



Executive Summary

Gwinnett Hospital System, Inc. is located in one of the fastest growing counties in the United States, in a community 30 miles northeast of Atlanta. In addition to its rapid population growth, the composition of the population has changed from 5 percent minority (non-Caucasian) in 1982 to 33 percent minority and 67 percent Caucasian in 2004. This trend is expected to continue into the foreseeable future. As the guardians of the community's good health, the system recognized the increasing diversity of the population and their unique needs. The system hired Roosevelt Thomas Consulting & Training, Inc. to assist with the creation and implementation of a diversity action plan. The consulting company began by conducting an organization-wide assessment to determine employee perceptions as well as the organization's strengths and weaknesses; a holistic approach was then created and implemented. The approach is comprehensive, including targeting recruitment and retention of minorities in the community, employee training, and an expansion of the culturally diverse care and services available for patients. The organization is committed to building on its longstanding relationship with the community, and will continually strive to improve the quality of care offered to all cultures in the community.

Organization Size: 479 beds

Program/Initiative Description

Embracing the Growing Population Diversity: Gwinnett Hospital System, Inc. is located in a community with a diverse and rapidly growing population. The hospital system sought to effectively manage the growing diversity within the organization in order to fulfill long-term corporate values, but was unsure where to begin. It hired Roosevelt Thomas Consulting & Training, Inc., which began by conducting an assessment to identify the organization's employee and management understanding and perceptions about cultural diversity, and the organization's current success at addressing the cultural issues surrounding both employees and patients. The consulting firm then created an action plan collaboratively with the organization's leadership, based on the survey's results and the organization's strengths and weaknesses.

The action plan is a holistic approach to addressing the diversity of the community that helps individuals feel comfortable and safe at the Gwinnett Hospital System, Inc. The plan will take several years to implement, after which the health system will constantly strive to maintain and improve its diversity management effectiveness.

The approach includes a number of elements, but one of the early efforts was the targeting of the large local Latino/Hispanic population to fill many vacant positions within the system, in which this population was underrepresented at the time. This was achieved by using a Spanish-speaking recruiter as well as offering an English as a Second Language class for all employees. Although the community already offered English as a Second Language courses, the waiting list was as long as one to two years. In addition to the group class, the hospital now provides a video program that new employees may use if they need assistance with the English language. This combined recruitment approach helped the health system fill its vacant positions with qualified, dedicated workers. In addition to filling these vacant positions, Gwinnett Hospital System's holistic approach includes a number of other initiatives, including:

- Diversity training modules in its employee orientation process
- A Diversity Council, which includes two physicians
- An emphasis on its corporate values and the importance of human relations
- Transcultural Perinatal Nursing, a specialized resource at the Gwinnett Women's Pavilion that equips providers with the skills and information necessary to address cultural and ethnic issues surrounding the perinatal care process
- Resources available for patients and providers on cultural diversity and religious diversity, including using the hospital chaplains and social workers as resources for clinical staff

Establishment of Program/Initiative: 2002

Racial or Ethnic Disparities Problem the Program/Initiative Was Designed to Address

- The health system is located in the geographic center of Gwinnett County, which was the fastest growing county in the country for six consecutive years and continues its rapid growth. This growth brought about a significantly more diverse population to the area, expanding from a 5% minority population in 1982 to 33% in 2003.
- Gwinnett County has the largest number of Latino/Hispanics and the largest number of Asians of any county in the state of Georgia.
- Gwinnett Hospital System, Inc. was struggling to fill many of its employee positions, and needed to form a relationship with the growing minority populations in the community to fill vacant positions.
- The number of associate complaints with a diversity component was increasing.
- The clinical staff was reporting an increasing number of challenges in providing effective patient care for the diverse patient and family populations.

Major Objectives

- Proactively embrace the growing diversity in the county, in the employee and patient populations, and of all those who interact with the hospital system.

- Continuously provide the same level of patient care for all patients regardless of cultural diversity, as expressed in the hospital system's mission and values.
- Ensure a positive and productive workplace for all employees, physicians, and other providers.

Significant Results

- The health system was able to fill many open positions quickly with a competent and hardworking population that is representative of the community's diversity. Gwinnett Hospital System, Inc. currently does not have any vacancies in targeted areas, as retention levels are high.
- Nineteen new employees graduated from the English as a Second Language course in 2002, most of whom continue employment with the system.
- Managers are reporting success using tools for diversity management that were shared in the initial manager training.

External Partners in the Program/Initiative: Roosevelt Thomas Consulting & Training, Inc., a consulting firm that helps clients create an environment that maximizes the potential of the entire workforce and manage the challenges and opportunities surrounding diversity in the workplace and marketplace.

Limitations or Problems Encountered: The process is ongoing and can be difficult to implement. Training must be addressed cautiously to make sure everyone is included and accurately represented.

Estimated Cost of the Program, To Date: The initial consulting fee was \$25,000-\$30,000, and the health system brought the consultants back on a per-diem basis for leadership and management training, at a cost of approximately \$3,000 per day of training.

Advice to Other Organizations That May Want to Start a Similar Program

- Consulting with an expert or an organization that has implemented a similar program before is essential.
- Involvement of and commitment from the organization's senior leadership is imperative. The initiative should not be seen as an HR program.
- An organization only gets one chance to implement a successful diversity initiative. If the program is not successful, the employees will question the validity of the organization's intentions and will often not give the organization a second chance. The implementation must be successful on the first try.
- Diversity initiatives must include all individuals working at the organization, including employees with long tenure.
- Early in the process, consider what measures will be used to determine effectiveness, recognizing that customer and employee satisfaction metrics may be the most appropriate.
- Develop a comprehensive communication plan to build momentum and understanding of the initiative among the employee and physician groups.

Contact Name: Susan M. Stubbs
Title: Director of Organizational Improvement
Email address: sstubbs@ghsnet.org
Telephone: (678) 442-4346
Fax: (770) 682-2220