



**ST. MARY'S REGIONAL  
MEDICAL CENTER  
LEWISTON, ME  
March 2005**

## **Executive Summary**

St. Mary's Regional Medical Center is located in a region that was 99 percent Caucasian until 2001, when it experienced an influx of African refugees and immigrants. The hospital wanted to continue its philosophy of reaching out to the poor and disadvantaged populations, so it created an advisory group composed primarily of individuals from the two new African cultures, the Togalese and the Somalis. The group established four objectives: (1) to guarantee health care access; (2) to ensure that employees and the community understand the perspectives and cultures of the new groups; (3) to create a hospital workforce that mirrors the community's racial and ethnic diversity; and (4) to collaborate with other community organizations to promote cultural diversity in the community. The hospital is now achieving all four of these goals, and has established itself as a strong supportive body for the community and its new citizens.

**Organization Size:** 230 acute care beds, 280 long-term care beds

## **Program/Initiative Description**

Integrating two African cultures into the Lewiston community: Beginning in 2001 the Lewiston community began to see a significant growth in population of cultures from two different African countries. The Togalese came in 2001 as refugees and settled with Catholic Charities. The hospital provided a welcome house for the new arrivals, and strived to establish itself as the employer of choice through collaboration with local churches and working with physicians. The following year, the community experienced the arrival of many new Somali immigrants. The CEO of St. Mary's Regional Medical Center wanted to help both of these new groups to make sure they received all the health care services and necessities required to establish their lives in the community.

As a result, the hospital formed a team consisting of the director of education, the marketing liaison, and the healthier community liaison. The three leaders identified the needs of the new residents and what they believed was necessary to make the new people feel welcomed and tied to the community and the facility. One of the decisions the team made was to form an advisory group composed primarily of the two new culture groups. The advisory group consisted of 12-15 individuals, and worked together to identify the new communities' needs. The group created four main objectives for the hospital and the community, and an implementation plan for each objective:

- Guarantee access to health care, with the hospital providing the necessary care and interpreters when needed. This also included the hospital and providers learning the different medical needs of the two new cultures.
- Ensure that people understand the situation the new groups were coming from, including the difference between a refugee and an immigrant and the differences between each country's cultures. The hospital promoted this understanding through community and staff education. An introduction to many of the different African cultures was also added to the hospital's new employee orientation program.
- Create a hospital workforce that mirrors the community's racial and ethnic diversity. Hiring the Togalese was less complex than hiring Somalis, because the Togalese spoke either English or French, the two languages used most in the region. Most Somalis did not all speak fluent English, which led the hospital to create a CNA program targeted toward first learning English, and then becoming certified as a CNA. The CNA program was taught at a 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, and included special tutoring to bring the students up to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade reading level required for the state CNA exam. The training program also included a prerequisite course teaching medical terminology in English. The 10-week course is an "earn while you learn" program. Each participant's tuition cost is taken out of their paycheck, but if they stay with the organization for one year they are reimbursed for their tuition.
- Collaborate with other community organizations to promote cultural diversity in the community. The hospital has both collaborated with existing organizations and assisted in creating new organizations. Several Somali groups have formed, and the hospital's education director sits on the board of one of the organizations. The hospital helps these new groups with everything from how to start a new business to providing furniture they may need. This has created loyalty to the hospital, and has also helped established these new cultures in the community.

### **Establishment of Program/Initiative: 2001**

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

- The state was 99% Caucasian when it experienced an influx of refugees from Africa two years ago. Many of the new people moved into an ethnically French area, which was established in the 1800s when a surge of people moved from Quebec.
- When the Somalis arrived, they brought the Muslim religion to a primarily Catholic town.

#### **Major Objectives**

- To continue the hospital's philosophy of reaching out to the poor and disadvantaged population.
- The community advisory group established by the hospital set the following four goals:

- To guarantee health care access to everyone, including interpreters and any other assistance the new groups may need
- To ensure people in the community understand the situation the new culture groups were coming from, including why they arrived in the community, what country they were from, and their cultural beliefs
- To create a hospital workforce that mirrors the community's ethnic composition
- To collaborate with other community organizations in order to promote cultural diversity

### **Significant Results**

- Individuals from both cultures are using the hospital's women's health practices as their provider of choice.
- The Somalis turn to the facility for assistance in other needs aside from health care, including housing, food, financial and emotional support, and business advice. The hospital has the reputation that it will find a way to help those in need.
- St. Mary's Regional Medical Center is now supporting the new minorities with continuing education; they are using the hospital's three benefits plans to establish careers in the health care field, including tuition reimbursement, tuition payment, and the loan forgiveness program.

### **External Partners in the Program/Initiative**

- Refugee Collaboration and many other community organizations
- Sisters of Charity Health System, the parent organization for St. Mary's Regional Medical Center

### **Limitations or Problems Encountered**

- Helping a French-ethnic centered organization to expand to different cultures.
- Understanding the new cultures, whom to trust as advisors within the group, and how the culture makes decisions.
- Helping employees and community to recognize that Africa is a continent of countries, and each country is very different from the others.
- Learning the different health care needs of the new cultures; for example, 99 percent of women from Somalia are circumcised.

**Estimated Cost of the Program, To Date:** Approximately \$10,000-\$15,000 for all the programs combined

### **Advice to Other Organizations That May Want to Start a Similar Program:**

Form an advisory group with the culture you want to work with, and take the time to become their friends. Eat with them, invite them into your homes, be a part of their lives, and let them become part of your life. This relationship should go beyond work, and must be a true commitment to become involved with their needs and wants.

**Contact Name:** Dale Morrell  
**Title:** Director of Education  
**Email address:** dmorrell@sochs.com  
**Telephone:** (207) 777-8760  
**Fax:** (207) 777-4397