



DESIGNING THE "HOSPITAL OF THE FUTURE"

by *Dave Gourley MHA, RRT, FAARC*

The Joint Commission has released a report that provides a roadmap to designing hospitals in the future. Titled "Guiding Principles for the Development of the Hospital of the Future," the latest in the "Healthcare at a Crossroads" series, the report offers the basic guidelines that must be followed for hospitals to meet future health care challenges. These challenges include quality and patient safety issues, an aging patient population, financial constraints and workforce issues.

The report explains that in light of increasing health care costs and the complexity of today's hospitalized patients, hospitals must respond in new and innovative ways. The report was developed by a roundtable panel of health care executives and clinical leaders, as well as experts in technology, health care economics, hospital design and patient safety. This team assessed the effect of sociologic and economic trends, technology, care environments, patient care values and staffing issues on future hospitals.

Mark Chassin, MD, president of the Joint Commission, said, "The importance of hospital-based care will not diminish in the future, but hospitals will have to meet the high expectations of the public and all stakeholders in an increasingly challenging environment." He continued by saying that hospitals should use this report to help them transition to meet future needs.

The report describes issues ranging from technology and personnel to patient relationships, and fiscal and architectural design. These are just a few ways hospitals can enhance health care for all patients.

The Five Principles

The report discusses these issues in terms of the following five principles: economic viability, technology adoption, patient-centered care, staffing and hospital design.

In light of the financial troubles of many hospitals nationwide, economic viability is the first core area. It is noted that there is a growing gap between profitable and unprofitable hospitals. As a result of an anticipated increase in the Medicare population and reduction in employer-provided insurance, publicly financed care and uncompensated care will increase in the future.

The report recommends the following guidelines for hospitals to remain economically viable:

- Align performance and payment systems to meet quality and efficiency-related goals;
- Use process improvement tools to increase efficiency and reduce costs;
- Pursue coverage options to ensure patient access to, and affordability of, health care services;
- Address how general hospitals and specialty hospitals can both fulfill the social mission for health care delivery.

Technology adoption is also essential to improving quality and patient safety. Information technology will support the continuum of care to community based and home care. This transformation to a technology-based system will cause caregivers and administrators to reassess the definition of a hospital.

The expert panel suggests the following elements in order to address technology in the hospital of the future:

- Make the business case and sustainable funding to support the widespread adoption of health IT;
- Redesign business and care processes in tandem with health IT adoption;
- Use digital technology to support patient-centered hospital care and extend that care beyond hospital walls;
- Establish reliable authorities to provide technology assessment and technology investment guidance for hospitals;
- Adopt technologies that are labor-saving.

Patient-centered care is a concept that the Joint Commission has been promoting for several years. Obviously, a patient is at the center of his or her care, but we have not routinely treated patients as partners in their own care. This concept is an essential part of high quality and safe health care. Additionally, family members and others with close relationships to the patient are also part of the health care partnership. The following actions are recommended in order to achieve patient-centered care:

- Make adoption of patient-centered care values a priority for improving patient safety, and patient and staff satisfaction;
- Incorporate patient-centered care principles into the activities



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- of hospital oversight bodies and transparency initiatives;
- Address barriers to patient and family engagement such as low health literacy and personal and cultural preferences;
- Eliminate disparities in the quality of care for minorities, the poor, the aged and the mentally ill;
- Improve the quality of care for the chronically ill through coordinated, multi-disciplinary care;
- Use process improvement tools to improve quality and safety.

Staffing, too, is an essential element of the hospital of the future, especially when considering the chronic shortage of certain health care professionals. The report makes the following recommendations to meet future workforce needs:

- Establish fair migration and compensation policies for countries facing shortages of health care workers;
- Expand health professional education and training capacity to accommodate the growing demand for health care workers;
- Create workplace cultures that can attract and retain health care workers;
- Develop professional knowledge and skills necessary in a more complex health care environment;
- Educate health professionals to deliver team-based care;
- Develop the competence of health professionals to care for geriatric patients.

The fifth and final core area in the hospital of the future is hospital design. It is well documented that design characteristics affect patient safety and health care outcomes. They provide a supportive environment for hospital staff. Unfortunately, hospitals are still not being built "safe by design." The report recommends the following actions:

- Improve safety with evidence-based design principles such as single rooms, decentralized nursing stations, and noise-reducing materials;
- Address high-level priorities such as infection control and emergency preparedness in hospital design and construction;
- Include clinicians and other staff, patients and families in the design process to improve staff work flow and patient safety, and create patient-centered environments;
- Design flexibility into the building to accommodate advances in medicine and technology;
- Incorporate "green" principles into hospital design and construction.

Looking Forward

The results of this roundtable panel in setting forth these guiding principles for the development of the hospital of the future have provided everyone in health care valuable information to be used as we plan for our institutions.

Already almost a decade into the 21st century, we are still using the systems we developed during the last century. Moving forward, we must do our best to plan for hospitals that will meet the quality and safety needs of our patients, and to provide safe and efficient work environments for health care workers. The hospital we develop most likely will serve each of us in the future.

This white paper is the latest in The Joint Commission's "Healthcare at the Crossroads" series. Launched in 2001, this series addresses high-level issues in health care and are focused on safe, high-quality health care. The full report can be obtained at the Joint Commission web site, www.jointcommission.org.

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