

When Director of Rehabilitation Services Kathy Berger received the Values in Action Award for Excellence from St. Joseph Hospital, she admits to feeling a bit uncomfortable about being singled out, since Kathy is all about collaboration and team effort. “It’s cool to watch *them* excel,” she says of her staff.

Her commitment to excellence is evident in the department’s high patient satisfaction ratings, a 20 percent increase in outpatient volume in FY09, as well as glowing remarks made by staff who nominated her for this award. A member of the St. Joseph Hospital family since 1991 and Director of Rehabilitation for 18 months, Kathy excels in leading her four areas: Inpatient Rehabilitation, Outpatient Rehabilitation, the Wound Care Center and Disney’s on-site clinic for cast members.

Kathy leads by example. Just last week she took off her administrative cap to help a patient who showed up unexpectedly, in a panic. The gentleman had been discharged from our hospital days earlier after knee replacement surgery. He couldn’t recall what he was supposed to do and couldn’t reach his doctor. Kathy took him into the gym and patiently reviewed with him his discharge instructions. He left saying she had saved his weekend, and he looked forward to returning there next week to begin rehabilitation.

She remarks. “Being where people are learning to walk again, talk again, and go out of their homes without worrying about being incontinent is a perfect setting for having Sacred Encounters, and that was a Sacred Encounter for me.”

### **Creates an environment of continuous improvement and learning**

Physical Therapy staff member Robert Johnson volunteers that Kathy is a department director who fosters a “cooperative, fun and stimulating environment to work in.” He continues, “Kathy is extremely approachable and always maintains an open door policy, making you feel very comfortable in talking with her about anything. While Kathy oversees many employees, she makes sure that each person is given individual attention and she is 100 percent effective following through with any issues an individual employee brings to her. Kathy is very thoughtful and proactive with ensuring her employees are satisfied and happy. Kathy has made

my experience as a new employee here at St. Joe's so wonderful that I truly look forward to a long career here."

Rehab Department Secretary Catherine Spalding adds, "Kathy has proven to be a very positive leader in our department. She encourages all staff to take outside classes as well as participate in classes offered at St. Joseph Hospital. Adjustments in patient schedules are made when possible to allow time for all in-services and classes appropriate to the staff's level of skills or possible advancement. For example, when Cliff Yee was promoted to Clinical Coordinator Kathy immediately scheduled him to attend a MediServe class in Arizona."

Yet another staff member, Laura Hernandez, claims, "Kathy encourages, guides and supports the Rehab staff. One of her biggest strengths is that she motivates us to continue our education in order to grow and enhance our careers."

Laura continues, "There are times when the morale of our department becomes low and people just don't seem as motivated. This is when Kathy steps in and through her humor and lightheartedness shows us that things aren't as bleak as we may make them out to be. She does a great deal to make our department an enjoyable place to work."

Kathy provided these insights into her leadership style: "I take a personal interest in my staff. I believe in work/life balance, which I've been fortunate to have and I try to give my staff the same support. My philosophy is to be straightforward, transparent and visible, without being overbearing. I've been accused of being a Polyanna, but I try to keep everybody positive, sometimes by teasing and joking around. I see a huge value in humor. In Rehab we're dealing with so many pressures of dealing with the ill and increasing productivity. People like to feel appreciated, and I also try to acknowledge their efforts."

In recent months two of her staff members have been promoted to management positions. "Although we've have a career ladder in place, it was somewhat vague. Now, I try to identify which projects people are passionate about. I get to know their skills and gifts and encourage the managers and clinical coordinators to do the same," shares Kathy.

**Responds to changing health care and organizational needs by learning new skills and behaviors and by improving performance, processes and service.**

Catherine notes, "Several new rehab programs have been developed by Kathy since she stepped into her role, first as Interim Director and now as Director: A Pelvic Floor program

(for people suffering with incontinence), a Post-Op Lung Program and the Respiratory and Breast Cancer programs. Each has been highly successful. Occupational Therapy staff members are now developing a program to screen eligibility for driver's licenses for Neuro and head trauma patients. We've had great interest in this area for years and are now able to pursue this service."

She adds, "As these new programs were being developed, new skills were required for therapists. With Kathy's encouragement, the therapists have stepped forward to seek the qualifications necessary. Not surprisingly, when the first patients arrived, qualified staff was in place and enthusiastically undertook the new procedures.

"With the success of these programs comes adjustment such as the need for treatment rooms and space in general. Space has always been a luxury in Rehab but now it is becoming a challenge. All of our cancer-related programs were projected to move to the new Cancer Center; however, as we all understand, the economy has temporarily rendered this impractical. However, Kathy is continuing to pursue avenues within our existing circumstances while offering the patients the best possible experience with the least amount of inconvenience."

Coming to terms with space issues prompted Kathy to "think outside of the box." She is optimistic that a 2,000 square-foot office space in the new Medical Office Tower adjacent to The Center for Cancer Prevention and Treatment will become a satellite Rehab facility by this summer. "It's going to improve patient satisfaction when cancer rehab services are in the same location as the other cancer services," she asserts.

Vice President of Operations Tom Hill recalls having no question in his mind that Kathy would rise to the challenge when she was promoted to Director of Rehabilitation Services. "There was such a high degree of respect by her then-peers, and her natural leadership skills were clearly evident. She is bright and motivated and builds solid relationships with her employees and those outside of her department. She has compelling ways of inspiring excellence. For example, she is a strong believer in the value of recognition, as evidenced by Rehab Services' CARE awards, given to physicians who provide excellent care to the St. Joseph Hospital community and support the mission of Rehab Services; and the Rehab STAR awards, recognizing special employees in the organization's other departments who are strong partners in patient rehabilitation and recovery."

### **Encourages new ideas and discovers and shares best practices**

For St. Joseph Hospital's Breast Cancer Survivor Program, Kathy tapped the skills and interest of a staff member who has had breast cancer and was willing to receive extra training. Now, Rehab will be a part of a clinical trial on a cancer-related fatigue exercise program for women undergoing chemotherapy.

A participant in the St. Joseph Health System's year-long Mission and Mentoring program, Kathy has also served as a "Super Mentor" at a Holistic Mini Summit. Kathy says she has enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about the mission of the Sisters and is passing on their mission and vision. She is also involved in the Leadership 360 pilot program, which she claims improves mentoring skills.

For the past three years, Kathy has been involved with the Values in Action Review Team, twice acting as Coordinator for Advocacy. She is also very proud of her department's community involvement with the Motel Kids Christmas party which just celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of serving those children in our community.

### **Establishes clear goals and plans**

"My goals," shares Kathy, "have involved marketing and program development. Our Rehab department hasn't been marketed; it's been known as a best-kept secret, which is not a good business model. I want to share the great things we're doing, which then encourages taking program development to the next level. I've gone to every physician business and sub-committee meeting I could find."

As a result, the hospital's outpatient rehabilitation volume increased 20 percent in FY09.

"Since Kathy took the position, she has been passionate about putting Rehab on the map and making it a center of excellence for patient care," claims Tom. "She has looked for and found ways to grow services and promote organizational awareness and respect for the work Rehab Services does. Without any browbeating she's created a vision and inspired staff to develop some very successful programs, such as those launched for our cancer patients."

### **Takes responsibility for individual and team actions and expects accountability for performance. Encourages team ownership of projects and service outcomes.**

“New roles have been developed with the Clinical Coordinators and Controllers to encourage leadership and ownership of projects in the Physical Rehab Department,” claims Catherine. “This action has filtered down, leading to more staff participation in all areas of the unit.”

Catherine praises Kathy’s openness to new ideas and suggestions: “A new occupational therapist joined our staff recently. Her main patient assignment was to lead the OT Neuro Program. After just a week or two she offered suggestions for a number of changes which she felt would be advantageous to the patients. Kathy welcomed the suggestions, and changes were enacted the very same day. These changes have resulted in the potential for a more positive experience for Neuro patients, allowing them to be more involved in their own recovery.”

Kathy recalls, “I’ve seen in the past where therapists focus on what they can’t do. I give our people a lot of freedom and space to excel and do their best and they’ve blossomed.”

And when things aren’t so positive? “I try to be present with my managers to work on issues together, without them feeling threatened,” she says.

**Demonstrates collaboration and encourages it in others.**

“We’re all in this together, with the same goal of the best possible outcomes for patients,” Kathy reasons. “The more collaborative we can be the better.”

That’s why, when Pulmonary Consultants Medical Group requested to use the Rehab area for a study involving Cystic Fibrosis patients, she didn’t let her area’s space limitations stop the project; she told them to “go for it.”

Strong collaboration has made Rehab’s annual motel kids Christmas party for the poor and disenfranchised a resounding success. This past year Kathy and her team gathered more than 100 donors and volunteers for this “love fest” for 76 delighted children. “It’s an incredibly powerful manifestation of the spirit of Christmas toward our Dear Neighbors,” notes Tom.

Kathy Berger believes that, “For those who choose Rehab, it’s not a job, it’s a calling.” Everyone at St. Joseph Hospital can be grateful that Kathy felt called into this healing profession. She is respected for her business acumen and commitment, professional creativity, and her ability to bring out the best in the 90 employees she leads.

Please accept this nomination of Kathy Berger for the St. Joseph Health System Values in Action Award for Excellence.