Harmonious Healthcare

One UNC Hospital’s facility cheers its patients with the power of song.

North Carolina Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill opened its doors in September 1952. Its mission was simple: Improve the health of all North Carolinians—from Murphy to Manteo, as we like to say here in the Old North State.

More than 60 years later, the principles behind that vision remain the same. Today, we strive to provide healthcare that blends expertise and empathy for our community, no matter where our patients are from or what health challenges they have.

For the past 10 years, UNC Hospitals—which includes N.C. Memorial, N.C. Women’s, N.C. Children’s, N.C. Neurosciences and N.C. Cancer hospitals—has hosted an employee-run multicultural fair to celebrate diversity, provide education and promote tolerance of differences. Every year, on the first Friday in November, our hospital lobbies—connected by a single hallway—fill with music, dance, food, exhibits and crafts. Employees from around the world share their cultures with each other, introducing their colleagues to the places they lived before they called North Carolina home.

Two years ago, a group of employees in our environmental services department formed a gospel choir—the Environmental Services Gospel Choir—to sing at the fair. The performance brought down the house, so to speak. The EVS Gospel Choir was so popular that it continued to receive requests to sing in patient rooms, at hospital events and in the hospital chapel long after the multicultural event where it first performed. Its role at UNC Hospitals was documented in an Emmy-nominated video.

A department of 260 employees, the environmental services team at UNC Hospitals conducts much of its work behind the scenes to ensure our patients’ rooms are clean and free of germs. The team’s efforts are vital work to the health and safety of our patients. But that’s not all these employees do. At UNC Hospitals, this group of employees goes the extra mile to make sure patients’ experiences are positive, interacting with patients and their families in ways that make them true participants in healthcare.

The EVS Gospel Choir is a manifestation of the overall commitment the department has demonstrated to our patients. In this age of patient-centric care, everyone plays a role in care delivery, from physicians and nurses at the bedside to staff members cleaning the furniture, wiping down the sink and emptying the trash in a patient’s room. Our physicians and clinicians see the most complicated and serious medical cases in North Carolina, but even with their level of expertise, they need help from everyone on our support services teams to improve outcomes and the patient experience.

Imagine you are in Chapel Hill waiting to receive a bone marrow transplant. You are a three-hour drive away from your friends, family, and work and community support groups. No matter how hard you try to connect with loved ones by phone, the health challenges you are facing and the fear you are experiencing cannot be shaken. Then you hear voices enter your room humming, singing, sharing music that reminds you of friends and family far away. The music transports you home. You want to hear more. You are comforted. That is what Shawn Davis, the choir’s founder, does for patients on the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit. That is what choir members like Erica Moreno do for the patients whose rooms she cleans. That is what the EVS Gospel Choir brings to our community.

The choir is made up of people of many different backgrounds, races and cultures. They are a strong representation of North Carolina today. The
group is supported by team members, department leaders and co-workers. When department leaders learned about the group, they purchased choir robes for them, and when environmental services employees learned that their colleagues’ choir was going to represent their department around the hospital, they offered to cover choir members’ duties to allow them to rehearse—a true team effort.

As the group performs at each of our hospitals, members of their department have supported them in person. Leaders report that their staff has received a significant boost in morale: They are proud to be represented by the choir. They believe they are part of a department that is providing emotional support to patients in need and that, as a department, they are touching lives.

It is because of efforts like those of the EVS Gospel Choir, our environmental services team—and others from disciplines throughout UNC Hospitals—that we continue to be a leader in patient satisfaction among academic medical centers across the nation.

Employee satisfaction also is soaring, ranking UNC Hospitals in the 91st percentile compared with Press Ganey’s National Healthcare Average. In all, 90 percent of our employees took last year’s Workforce Engagement Survey, and 98 percent say they like the work they do. What these numbers tell us is that we have an engaged and committed team focused on providing the very best care to our patients.

At UNC Hospitals, we base our values on five pillars: people, quality and service, growth, value and innovation. When our employees focus on these pillars, we achieve organizational harmony. We blend the expertise and empathy we seek to provide and produce great healthcare. The EVS Gospel Choir is a clear example of the harmony we create. The members of this choir show us what’s possible every time their varied voices join together to produce beautiful music that touches the lives of our patients and their families.

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