In early 1999 St John of God Health Care (SJGHC) Bunbury, a regional private hospital in Western Australia was relocated to the South West Health Campus. This innovative move co-located private and public hospitals with tertiary and technical education providers.

The move to new premises created an unexpected drop in patient numbers and caused a period of unrest and uncertainty that led to a dramatic fall in staff morale. The SJGHC core values “Excellence, Respect, Hospitality, Justice and Compassion” were not perceived as being the lived experience of caregivers.

The overarching impact of the move and the lack of engagement and consultation during this time became apparent. The Press Ganey employee and doctor satisfaction surveys of 2000 provided the evidence that we had hit an all time low. The employee survey ranked SJOGHC Bunbury at the 3rd %tile nationally. The doctor survey was correspondingly low at the 8th %tile ranking.

The appointment of a new CEO in late 2000 bought new vision and a management style that embraced openness, engagement and ownership at all levels. Strategies were adopted that would promote shared responsibility and opportunity to grow and lead at all levels. New positions were created and reporting lines streamlined so that voices of stakeholders could be heard.

A target was set to reach the 75th %tile for employee satisfaction within two years. This was achieved in 2002 and now stands at the 89th %tile. The results show the dramatic turnaround in the hospital’s effectiveness and ability to progress forward as a key healing centre in the South West of Western Australia. The hospital is now regularly contacted by other hospitals in both Western Australia and other parts of the country wishing to visit and study the facility’s operations.

Press Ganey is proud to present the SJOGHC Bunbury story as a finalist in the 2005 Success Story Competition.........
St John of God Health Care (SJGHC) in Bunbury in Western Australia, part of the national St John of God Health Care organisation the 5th largest private health provider in Australia, is a 92-bed private hospital originally established in 1927. In March 1999 the hospital was co-located with the Western Australia Government operated Bunbury Regional Hospital.

From the outset the move to new premises created an unexpected drop in patient numbers. Although this fall has now been reversed it caused a period of unrest and uncertainty that led to a dramatic fall in staff morale and perceptions of the hospital’s status as a place to work. The SJGHC core values “Excellence, Respect, Hospitality, Justice and Compassion” were not perceived as being the lived experience of caregivers.

The move in 1999 to new premises at the South West Health Campus should have set the benchmark for health care services in the South West.

The single storey facility, featuring rammed earth walls, eucalyptus grey roof, extensive water features and tranquil garden retreats, was certainly first class. With its position adjacent to the public hospital and tertiary educational facilities St John of God Bunbury faced a prosperous future.

However, significant challenges inhibited the management’s ability to make the smooth transition, particularly from a cultural viewpoint.

The existing reporting mechanisms made it difficult for the voices and concerns of employees to be easily heard. Promotion and ownership was not encouraged. A decision not to transfer enrolled nurses over to the new facility created resentment in the community which had been underestimated.

Patient numbers fell dramatically as referrals dropped and surgery cases decreased. In the first year of operation bed occupancy averaged just 60%.

The use of small nursing “hubs” (designed to manage up to 8 patients) replaced the more conventional central nurses station, the removal of the enrolled nurses and a dramatic increase in the use of agency staff led to the break up of “teams” within the nursing staff.

The low bed occupancy, lower surgery rates and high use of agency staff all placed financial pressures on the hospital, returning a financial loss in the first year of operation. Changes in the Hospital executive led to a loss of corporate memory and uncertainty.

Nurse Unit Manager, Maureen Myers reflects: “We were in crisis management five years ago and the ‘mission’ did not come to the fore. We were juggling agency staff on a daily basis and a lot of people were doing double shifts.

The effect of the “flowdown” to the rest of the executive and management and its impact on all staff became evident in the Press Ganey Surveys of 2000 (employee perception and doctor satisfaction).

After a year of transition, where employees had attempted to adapt to enormous change, the overarching impact of the move and the lack of engagement and consultation during this time resulted in St John of God Bunbury scoring at the 3rd percentile nationally for the Press Ganey Employee Perception Survey (October 2000). The Doctor satisfaction survey was correspondingly low at the 8th percentile ranking. The hospital had hit an historical low.

A new CEO, Mark Grime, commenced his appointment in mid 2000 and was faced with an environment of low morale, inefficient administration technologies, low bed rate occupancy and a financially constrained operation that had lost the “mission” in the background noise of the facility's difficulties.

He set about restructuring the facility into a hospital that was profitable, provided care and understanding to both patients and staff, and engaged the community and medical practitioners.
The Challenge

The first task was to deal with a management structure that had taken on a “bunker” mentality.

Next to tackle was the structure of reporting mechanisms to ensure the voices and concerns of employees could be easily heard and promotion and ownership encouraged.

The work environment, in which nurses cared for their patients, had significantly altered. The layout of the building caused nurses to work in isolation from their peers. Long corridors of private rooms had replaced a traditional ward layout.

There were no specialised areas, thus requiring nurses to be multi-skilled across all specialties. The ability to choose an area that held personal interest and expertise had been removed and multi-skilling took on new meaning, as it became the reality of every day practice.

Doctors were dis-enfranchised with the hospital. There was a lack of facilities for specialists and there was a lack of communication between upper management and doctors.

The Recovery

Mark Grime’s appointment brought new vision and a management style that embraced openness, engagement and ownership at all levels. Strategies were adopted that included a restructure of the organisation that would promote shared responsibility and opportunity to grow and lead at all levels. New positions were created so that portfolios and responsibilities were manageable and achievable. Reporting lines were streamlined and restructured so that voices of stakeholders could be heard.

A policy of transparency in the operations of the hospital was implemented. Staff and medical practitioners were made aware of how decisions would be made. Information from financial records was made available to the medical staff so they could understand the financial shape of the hospital and where it was bleeding funds. They too were a part of the solution.

Senior executive and middle management was strengthened and two Senior Nurse Managers were appointed, one to oversee operational clinical matters and one to oversee administrative and financial matters.

Physical changes to the wards and the hospital actively working with the enrolled nurses enabled them to return to providing direct patient care on the wards. The use of agency staff progressively diminished with significant costs savings.

“We also opened up administration software and information systems to all staff. Previously areas like rosters had been done by hand, making it difficult for staff to be flexible and plan holidays and days off. We installed simple but effective software to simplify the procedures”, said Grime.

A summary of the key changes made in the first two years include:

- A commitment to improve the physical environment for nursing staff, with a redesign of the floor layout. Removing the isolation in turn improved communication between all health team members.
- Enrolled nurses were re-engaged at the bedside and given opportunity to increase their competency and knowledge base.
- Access to data at a middle management level enabled the daily planning of resources and improved efficiencies across all areas including staffing, bed allocation, theatre management, supply, patient meals and annual leave.
- Departmental action plans addressed individual departmental issues and ensured that all employees were involved and engaged.
- Dedicated “Reflection Days” for each staff member provided reflection on the mission, values, opportunities for personal growth and time out.
- Provision of rewards for departments in recognition of time and effort during stressful and or busier periods and an annual gift of appreciation for the past years commitments and efforts for each employee.
- Dedicated time for employees to increase knowledge and address mandatory competencies that would improve patient and staff safety.
• Commitment to ensure that annual performance appraisals for all employees would be conducted. The system was reviewed to ensure that performance appraisals would be employee focused and would allow employees to be self-determining of their development with organisational support.

• Executive commitment to patient safety, quality improvement and risk management principles.

• The appointment of a General Practitioner Liaison Officer to improve communication between the hospital, staff and medical community.

A target was set to reach the 75th %tile for employee satisfaction within two years.

The Results

Quality Coordinator, Fran Wheeler observes, “the new CEO implemented an open door policy. Management was once again available to staff and if a problem was reported it was dealt with. Accountability at all levels was much stronger and staff programming allowed for a culture of multi-disciplinary skilling and specialisation, depending on preference”.

“We now have in place much better communication programs for getting customer feedback and there is consulting between the nursing staff and the general practitioners. Working at the hospital is now a job you can be proud to have”.

Area Manager Ferns Ward, Amanda Jones, said it took two years to rebuild nurses and other staff into efficient teams but that now morale was vastly improved.

“The change has filtered right down to the graduate students that come and work for us, most of them now stay on at the hospital”, she said.

The improvement in both the culture and the facility is evident in the number of patients treated. In 2003 the hospital admitted 4,774 patients for day surgery compared to 3,073 in 1999. Overnight cases increased by 1,015 in the four year period since the move with the number visiting theatre also increasing by 2,770.

With the restoration of the hospitals financial strength it was once again in a position to put even more focus on the community through social outreach and advocacy programs.

Accurate data and the sharing of information at all levels of the organisation now supported decision-making. Employees are now provided with the reasoning and data behind decisions and are given opportunity for input.

The lived experience of SJGHC core values became a reality rather than a token, of where the hospital would like to be.

The positive nature and outcome of this new vision coupled with an organisation that has now become receptive, flexible and supportive is highlighted in the following Press Ganey Employee Perception Survey results.
The Success Story

The results show a dramatic turnaround in the hospital’s effectiveness and ability to progress forward as a key healing centre in the South West of Western Australia. The hospital is now regularly contacted by other hospitals in both Western Australia and other parts of the country wishing to visit and study the facilities operations.

The hospital’s reputation has also allowed it to attract quality administrative and clinical staff and support specialist medical practitioners move away from the traditional base of metropolitan Perth. The hospital has also become a centre for rural proceduralist general practitioners to use the facilities under the supervision of specialists and maintain their clinical skills. supporting rural people having access to care closer to home.

More recently, the hospital has attracted many new medical practitioners, with new Orthopaedic Surgeons, an Obstetrician/Gynaecologist, a Urologist, Anaesthetists, numerous General Practitioners and specialist diagnostic providers relocating. This has all led to the South West Health Campus taking on the role of the primary referral centre for the South West region.

Patients accessing private health services in the South West has also increased with fewer travelling to Perth, benefiting the patient, families and communities.

Some statistics on hospital activity include:

- A 25% increase in patients having day surgery.
- Almost 5,000 day procedures were performed in 2002.
- An increase of 120% (4,600) patients admitted for single day hospitalisation in 2002, including oncology, renal dialysis and surgery.
- Eligible Veterans now can freely choose to come to St John of God, Bunbury. This was achieved in June 2002.
- Almost twice as many people from outside of greater Bunbury used the facility in 2002 compared to 1998.
- 1,000 more patients admitted and stayed in the hospital for more than 1 day despite a reduction of beds from 120 to 92 with the new facility.

Grime said: “The co-located facility after four years has proven to be a great success. People are now able to access excellent health services without having to necessarily travel to Perth with approximately 25 specialists either resident or visiting Bunbury”.

The hospital is also looking at an $11 million expansion to add an additional 28 beds and operating suite facilities. Plans are well advanced to accommodate and incultrate the new staff. It is anticipated more medical specialists will move to Bunbury as the health campus expands.

Additional positive results and achievements have been:

- An occupancy consistently at 90-95% due to better management and the building of better doctor and staff relations;
- Reduction in agency staff to a level below 1%;
- Good retention and minimal sick leave;
- 4 Years Accreditation with the Australian Council of Health Care Evaluation Quality Improvement Program;
- Gold Award achieved from Work Safe Australia in 2004 in recognition of safety and health in the workplace and contribution to the reduction of work related safety and health;
- EOWA award for Employer of Choice for Women.

Going forward, the future looks bright for St John of God Bunbury, its staff and its patients. Grime is a CEO that in his own words has “a fire in my belly – I love to work with people and let them fly”.

“We seek to continue the tradition of compassionate care started by the Sisters of St John of God in Australia in 1895. The Sisters said ‘you must do good work’ and that is our goal”, he said.

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