

2021 IONL Innovation in Health Care Award

Resiliency in a Pandemic: A Critical Focus and Priority

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Purpose: High performing companies have an essential common factor, engaged employees. It has been proven that having an engaged workforce in healthcare leads to high patient satisfaction scores, improved patient outcomes, and a safer environment. A key to engagement is having a resilient workforce that demonstrates the ability to adapt to change and meet the demands of a stressful environment. This past year our Employee Engagement survey (EES) indicated a significant drop in the category of *Well-Being*. Concurrently, Mercy saw a drop in our patient experience scores and an increase in staff turnover. The health, wellness and resiliency of our healthcare team became a top priority. The Mercy Senior Leadership team was also concerned about the ongoing stress and demands of the pandemic surges and determined it was time for action.

Background: The 2020 Employee Engagement survey was taken in August of 2020 a couple of months after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The climate was stressful, staff were concerned about exposure, and safely staffing the patient care areas was a challenge. The EES *Well-Being* questions that were asked were: 1. My Work leaves me emotionally drained and 2. I can enjoy my personal time without focusing on work matters. Both scores were significantly below benchmark and below previous years scores. Senior Leadership saw this as a priority and charged the Employee Engagement team to direct and “own” this engagement category. All Department Directors were instructed to share survey results, solicit feedback, and put an action plan in place that addressed staff well-being.

Practice Strategies: The Employee Engagement team and Directors stepped up and collectively identified several initiatives that were key elements of addressing Well-Being. These initiatives included:

1. Establishment of a Night Partnership Council (NPC)-a shared governance structure that meets monthly with representatives from all departments.
2. Identification of a room that was converted to a “Zen Den”- a quiet place with massage chairs, diffusers, and yoga mats.
3. Thank-you Tuesdays- greeting staff as they came onto their shifts in the early morning and early evening. This included rolling carts with candy and healthy snacks.
4. Faith Over Fear Awards- initiation of a program that each day at our hospital safety huddle a staff member was identified who went out of their way to assist a fellow co-worker, or patient.
5. Dissemination of a Compassion Fatigue Toolkit - a well known phenomenon throughout the pandemic of the high potential for physical and mental exhaustion by those who care for the sick over an extended period of time.
6. Purposeful “retail therapy”- hospital gift shop “pop-ups” that gave staff the opportunity to shop in the hospital gift shop without the concerns of going to a shopping mall. While many gift shops closed in other hospitals we chose to continue to offer staff safe retail opportunities.

7. Weekly meal donations - Mercy worked with a family-owned, community-minded organization that generously donated three meals per week for day, night, and weekend staff for the duration of four months (December 2020-March 2021). This amazing donation amounted to over 7,000 meals and touched every single Mercy employee. We worked with locally-owned restaurants in the area to provide the meals, and our department leaders assisted in the weekly deliveries to every employee working. This \$60,000 donation was a win-win for our staff and the small restaurant owners who had experienced a large decline in business.

Evaluation: The goal of our work is to increase our employees' sense of well-being and to demonstrate an improvement in the Employee Engagement survey scores, specifically the composite of *Well-Being*. The 2021 EES survey is scheduled to be completed in May and upon receiving results we will be able to determine if we were able to influence this composite. There have been several early indicators that staff are recognizing and taking action toward improving these quality of life indicators. The Zen Den was established in late-September of 2020 and has had 1,647 visits since it has opened. The NPC has successfully completed its first year and this team's first deliverable was completion of a communication tool. Thank-you Tuesday has now become a ritual that staff not only look forward to but often schedule around. The Compassion Fatigue toolkit was shared with all frontline staff, the leader from ICU and PCU (COVID units) have had support group sessions with a resiliency coach to address ways to manage the ongoing stress and demands of the pandemic.

Conclusion and Implications: For 133 years, CHI Health Mercy Hospital has dedicated itself to serving the Southwest Iowa community. The principles of our foundresses, the Sisters of Mercy, live on through our work today as we heal the body, mind, and spirit of every patient who walks through our doors. Mercy employees are a critical component to this mission and the well-being of our staff is one of our top priorities. Happy health employees make for a safe, healing patient environment. The upcoming survey results will give us a pulse check as to how our employees are rating their well-being. This work is just beginning and it will be critical that our employees' wellness stays as one of our top priorities.

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