



Lincoln Hospital national quality leader

(May 2004) Lincoln Hospital is on the cutting edge nationally for quality improvement.

How do we know?

"It came from a study by one of the premiere research centers on rural health in the nation," says Administrator Tom Martin.

Dr. Ira Moscovice of the University of Minnesota is contracted with Medicare to research how its Critical Access program is working in rural hospitals. His most recent model for innovation in quality improvement was Lincoln Hospital.

What did he find that we're doing right?

Let's start with the Quality Improvement program itself.

"Dr. Moscovice was not only impressed that we employ Dennis Porter to oversee the program, but he liked the formalized structure of our internal QI reporting system. All departments — dietary, acute care, PT, housekeeping, business office, medical records — *all* departments have a QI reporting process."

Not only do we have an internal reporting process, Lincoln Hospital is looking outside of its walls for ways to improve service.

"Dr. Moscovice was impressed that we've banded together with other Critical Access Hospitals to share experiences and get input on how to improve quality," says Tom.

To do that, Lincoln Hospital spearheaded the effort to form the Quality Network — a limited liability company that shares resources and information to improve services at rural hospitals.

"What Dr. Moscovice was most surprised by is that we are all so committed to quality that we assess ourselves dues to fund it," says Tom.

Key to the Quality Network is Dr. Myron Bloom.

Dr. Bloom is a physician and the former VP of Medical Affairs at Holy Family Hospital. Dr. Bloom goes to all 29 member hospitals and personally reviews patient cases. Seeing himself as a coach, he gives input into how things could be better done.

This process is called Peer Review.

"In the past, this was a difficult thing to do as our providers critiqued each other," says Tom of the process. "Having an independent, outside source to look over these charts and give unbiased feedback is a priceless commodity."

Working throughout the network, Dr. Bloom finds patterns in patient care concerns and helps the group to solve issues they might consider insurmountable on their own.

"Many of these concerns have to do with funding," admits Tom.

Currently, reimbursements from insurance companies are dwindling. Physicians and hospitals are not getting paid the full worth of their services. Add to this the increasing amount of charity care given by rural public hospitals and the problem becomes evident.

"That's why we were one of the first Critical Access Hospitals in the nation," says Tom of this federal program. "With this designation, we now receive cost-based reimbursement for Medicare services. It's stabilized the local healthcare system and made growth possible."

Because of higher reimbursement, Lincoln Hospital can purchase new equipment and upgrade facilities. It can also provide the personnel and expertise to strive toward quality in all aspects of service.

"We want to be the best rural hospital in the state — in the nation. It is achievable."