

Returning Luster To A Jewel In Boston's Health Care Crown Massachusetts in focus

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by Bill Smith

Boston has long been the quality leader of America's health care industry, particularly when it comes to world-class hospitals. Many of the nation's finest facilities are located in the city. And for more than 75 years, Jewish Memorial Hospital was part of that history of excellence. As one of only two long-term acute care (LTAC) facilities in Boston, MA, it was an indispensable resource for area hospitals needing to refer patients for post-operative rehabilitation and other long-term care services.

However in the 1990's and the early part of this decade, the hospital lost its footing. By the summer of 2005, Jewish Memorial was losing \$300,000 a month, and city leaders and health care advocates were worried that its days could be numbered. Yet now, less than a year later, the hospital is in the midst of a dramatic turn-around. Today, the hospital is no longer losing money, and it is once again a thriving part of Boston's community of hospitals.

Success story

Renamed Radius Specialty Hospital-Boston, the facility's revival began in June of 2005 when Radius Healthcare began managing the hospital in preparation for acquiring it, which occurred in December 2005. Massachusetts-based Radius Healthcare had already enjoyed success as the owner and operator of 10 area nursing homes, and the company's leaders saw the LTAC as a natural extension of its business. When the hospital became available, Radius won a competitive bidding process to take ownership. In making its choice, the selection committee praised Massachusetts-based Radius Healthcare for its commitment to continue operating the hospital in its current Boston location, and for its reputation for providing high quality health care.

“This was a great opportunity for Radius,” said Jon Banton, president of Radius Specialty Hospital and a partner in Radius Healthcare. “But we were also faced with a lot of challenges.”

Among those challenges was reigning in costs. But according to Radius Senior Vice President Dave Longmoore, cost was only part of the equation. “As important as it was to reduce expenses,” he said, “it was absolutely essential that we do it without undermining the quality of care.

“When we began managing the hospital we found that there were opportunities to reduce certain administrative and third party contract costs, preserving our direct care staff,” continued Longmoore. “This was a huge advantage for us because we inherited a lot of excellent caregivers, and it was imperative to continue and expand rather than curb

this tradition.”

Reducing non-clinical expenses wasn't enough, though. Soon after acquiring the hospital, the new administration negotiated more favorable rates with key managed care providers. Radius managers also felt that care could be provided more efficiently by consolidating some services, and they reduced the number of patient care units from four to three.

“Consolidating these units could have been a nightmare,” said hospital CEO Bill Duffy. “But the staff really pulled together to assure that the reorganization worked.”

The unions representing the hospital's direct care staff played a central role in the process. “We reached out to the Massachusetts Nurses Association and the SEIU from day one, and both were very important partners in the process,” said Duffy. “They helped us restructure schedules for our patient care staff and deploy caregivers more resourcefully. Together, we were able to save a lot of jobs, and in the process, preserve the quality of care.”

The collaborative reorganization went so well that demand for services began to once again increase. Referral sources including Boston hospitals, physicians, and other health care professionals gained confidence that quality of patient care would be preserved and enhanced through the implementation of best clinical and business practices. Within five months of reducing the number of patient units, the hospital was ready to open a new nursing unit to meet increased demand.

Focusing on care

In the past year, hospital administrators have concentrated on much more than just saving money. One of Radius' first initiatives upon acquiring the hospital was instituting a more rigorous system for tracking quality indicators.

“It's essential for any hospital to be continuously looking at outcomes,” said Nicholas Nace, MD, Radius Specialty Hospital's medical director. “We need to know what we are doing that leads to successful outcomes, and which practices and policies can lead to problems.”

According to Nace, Radius has also brought a more patient-centric approach to hospital management. “We have experienced an important change to our culture since Radius took over. We are more customer service focused now. We have been encouraged to be more aware of what it's like to be a patient, and I think it has had an important impact on the quality of care we provide.

“These changes have also benefited our staff,” continued Nace. “Our caregivers are excited because they can see that outcomes are getting better, and that our patients are happier with the care they are receiving.”

While much has changed at Radius Specialty Hospital over the past year, some important historical connections remain.

For one, the hospital still enjoys a productive partnership with Boston Medical Center (BMC), sharing some of the world's leading medical specialists.

Furthermore, as operating improvements and commitment to the future of Radius Specialty Hospital's main campus have become more evident, the partnership between Radius Specialty Hospital and BMC has begun to grow for the first time in a number of years. The expansion of the partnership has benefited both institutions, with BMC having immediately proximate access to the finest post-acute services available and Radius Specialty Hospital being able to provide a wider array of physician driven specialty services. Through this partnership, Radius Specialty Hospital administers a world-renowned ventilator program, as well as a geriatric behavioral program and post-surgical trauma care for patients requiring extensive rehabilitation.

In addition to BMC, local hospitals like Beth Israel and Brigham and Woman's rely on Radius Specialty Hospital to provide long-term acute care for their patients. The success that Radius Specialty Hospital enjoys providing LTACH services to its hospital partners and their patients has led to exploration of new program partnerships that bode well for the future of Radius Specialty and the community it serves.

“We are fully aware of our responsibility to the community,” said Duffy. “This facility has been here for nearly a century -- in fact, this was the original site of Beth Israel Hospital. We have always been an important part of Boston's healthcare landscape, and a vital neighborhood resource. As excited as I am about the progress we've made over the past year, I'm just as excited about the role we will continue to play for years to come.”