

## What is a Hospital?....It Depends Upon Your Perspective! By Thomas J. Williams & Heather I. Williams



It's not a trick question but it is a very simple question. Based upon your perspective the question can be answered very differently. Some of the answers may surprise you. Let's look at some examples:

- In our recently published book we described a hospital as “a health care institution with an organized medical and professional staff and with inpatient beds available around the clock. Its primary function is to provide inpatient medical, nursing and other health-related services to patients for both surgical and nonsurgical conditions. It also typically provides some outpatient services, particularly emergency care.”<sup>1</sup> This provides a specific definition.
- For an orthopedic surgeon a hospital is a location that allows him/her to schedule Operating Room time to perform much needed surgery and then provide post-operative care for their patients.
- To a hospitalist it's a place to practice medicine and care for patients without the responsibilities and requirements associated with managing or joining a physician office-based practice.
- To a nurse it's an environment to provide inpatient compassionate care for adults, children or infants in need and that allows for on-going employment and continuous learning.
- For a patient about to undergo hip or knee replacement surgery it's the facility they enter with the hope their nagging pain will be eliminated or greatly reduced so they can lead a more normal life.
- For an expectant mother it's the venue where she will welcome her newborn into the world with the reassurance that if she or the baby needs additional care it can be provided swiftly and competently.
- For many members of the local community, a hospital is a place to stay away from and out of. For them it conjures up the memory of a location where people go that are injured or very sick.
- For a trauma surgeon it's the location that allows him/her to examine, diagnose and surgically treat critically injured patients.
- For the ED physician it's the location that provides self-satisfaction that is achieved in being able to treat, admit or discharge patients that seek medical attention.
- For the CEO it's the venue that allows him/her to have pride in leading a healthcare institution in a local community that has an outstanding reputation for quality and patient accessibility.

- For some patients it's a place where harm came to them because of a never event, medication error or inadvertent practitioner judgment error.
- For the Chaplain it's a place to help families and visitors find meaning and support in their circumstances.
- For some individuals or families, it's a memory of a loved one saved or lost.
- For a manufacturer's clinical specialist it's their work environment to teach clinicians how to use their product in a safe, cost effective manner to drive measurable clinical, financial and/or operational outcomes.
- For the CFO it's a place to work where they take responsibility for the overall financial administration of the organization to ensure they can continue to perform their mission.
- For the Joint Commission it is one more site that they visit to evaluate and accredit if it meets their quality standards.
- For the consultant it's a place of observation and investigation to help improve operational efficiencies under a contractual agreement.
- For a payor it's the organization that is paid for services rendered to its beneficiaries.
- For the Chief Data Officer, it's the location where a hospital executive takes responsibility for data governance, analytics initiatives and anything else related to the use of data to meet HIPAA requirements and the varying needs of the institution.
- For a sales representative it's an existing or potential account for business.
- For the Discharge Coordinator it's the venue that allows them to facilitate a patient's movement from one healthcare setting to another, or to home.
- For the Governing Board it's the legal entity that is ultimately responsible for hospital policy, organization, management and quality of care.
- For some individuals a hospital is a place that costs too much.
- For a Vice President of Sales in Medical Products, Devices, System Sales, Services Sales or Life Sciences it's their target market.
- For the Admissions Director of a Skilled Nursing Facility, a hospital is a source of new patient referrals and possible admissions.

By now you can see that the question "what is a hospital" means different things to different people. We don't all view a hospital in the same way. The context of our relationship or opportunity with the hospital along with emotion, logic, personal feelings, education, job responsibilities and other factors both frame and cloud our thinking.

### **Parting Thoughts**

For both of the authors a hospital has always been very personal. It's more than the definition we described earlier. For Heather it was a primary workplace where she successfully sold Operating Room booms, tables and lights for a medical equipment manufacturer.

For Tom it was a workplace where as a Department Director he was able to lead a dedicated team of Respiratory Therapists to provide care for infants and children with respiratory disorders and those that were on life support. Later in life it was a job of leading as CEO, a talented group of physicians, clinicians and support personnel in providing care in a specialty hospital setting. Two years ago it was the setting where he received several days of inpatient treatment for an unknown virus.

Here is what we can unequivocally say about a hospital. Everyone that works there is dedicated to improving the quality of care each and every day. The medical staff is comprised of licensed physicians and other licensed individuals permitted by law and by the hospital to provide patient care services. Their clinical excellence is a testimony to their training, experience and on-going commitment to continuing education. The nurses are highly trained, dedicated and compassionate individuals. They are the unsung heroes of any healthcare institution and they don't receive enough credit for the work they perform selflessly. The other professionals and support personnel within the hospital milieu work tirelessly to assist the physicians and nurses so they can perform their jobs often under extremely tough conditions and stress.

In general, most hospitals are extremely well managed but they are under constant duress since the regulatory and reimbursement climate changes frequently. Can hospitals improve their financial, clinical and operational performance? Certainly! Outside organizations continually report their shortfalls, penalties and other problems that hospitals incur. They remind us continually that hospitals are not perfect.

One thing is certain. The hospitals in our local communities are there to serve. In recent times we have seen several weather induced emergencies or shootings occur that resulted in mass casualties. There are many people alive today because of the preparation, skill, response and execution of the dedicated individuals within our nations hospitals. We may be biased but it's our belief that the people that work there are very special.

Our final question for you is "how to define a hospital"?

#### References

1. Williams TJ and Williams HL: *Selling to Hospitals & Healthcare Organizations: A Glossary of Business Acumen & Personnel*. Available on Amazon, Create Space and Kindle

As always we welcome your thoughts and input. Let's start a discussion with a thoughtful and informative discourse.

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