

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure to be here with you today. Thank you to the Hamilton Rotary Club for this opportunity to speak with all of you about our hospitals and some of the issues we face.

As the Island's only acute and mental health hospitals, we play a significant role in health care. Let me paint a picture for you with some figures.

Last year alone, our staff:

- Cared for **32,000** visits to the emergency department
- Admitted and discharged almost **7,000** inpatients, and
- Helped deliver **825** babies

It's fair to say that our hospitals touch each and every member of the Bermuda community either directly or indirectly.

I would like to take this opportunity to speak with you about the services the hospital provides and some of the key issues we face: finances, recruitment and retention of qualified staff, technology, infrastructure, and of course, continuous improvement of patient care.

BHB SERVICES

At KEMH and Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute, we provide comprehensive diagnostic, treatment and rehabilitative services. These include everything from basic health care and community activities, to the most specialized programs for life-threatening injuries and illnesses.

We are happy to report that we have very recently achieved a three-year accreditation from the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation. We will be making a formal announcement in the next few days about this important achievement, which will include key successes achieved by the BHB over the past three years as well as areas for improvement.

For now let me just say that I am very proud and grateful to our staff for their commitment and hard work that helped us achieve accreditation.

Diabetes, obesity, cardiac disease, cancer and mental illness are some of the most prevalent health conditions in Bermuda and we are proud of the programmes and services we have in place to treat these conditions and many others. Indeed, we offer an extensive range of services for the size of population we serve.

There are certain services that we cannot offer. Some of the procedures that we send patients away for, after stabilizing them at King Edward, are advanced cardiac investigations, neonatal surgery, neurosurgery and advanced radiotherapy.

We assess these services based on several factors such as the number of people who need the service, the availability of healthcare professionals who can provide it, and the associated cost.

Like all community hospitals, we have a referral relationship with larger hospitals that do offer these services. Fortunately for us and our patients, our referral network includes Johns Hopkins - which as been ranked as the number one hospital in the United States for 14 consecutive years, the Lahey Clinic and Partners International, which includes Brigham and Women's Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital.

We are very keen to leverage these relationships to the maximum benefit of our patients and staff going forward.

I could spend the afternoon discussing the services and programmes we offer, but would rather use my time today to tell you about some of the issues and challenges we face. I encourage you to visit our newly redesigned website

www.bermudahospitals.bm to find out more about our services.

There is a wealth of well-organised, easy to read information on the site about KEMH and MWI.

FINANCES

Finances are often cited as the one of the major concerns for hospital administrators.

I am pleased to say that the BHB produced a positive net return for the past two years. The primary factors that led to this are sound financial management, increased use of outpatient services and cost containment in several areas.

People often ask me, how do the hospitals make money? It's important for our stakeholders to understand that the Bermuda Hospitals Board generates revenue from three primary resources:

- Fees for services rendered
- Government grant from operating MWI, and
- Donations

Fees for services rendered are classified as either inpatient or outpatient services. All rates are set annually by government regulation.

The Bermuda Government pays for all services received for children under the age of 16, persons deemed to require financial assistance and those over 65 years of age by way of a partial subsidy.

The BHB gratefully receives donations from the community, with our most consistent donor being the Hospitals Auxiliary of Bermuda. Purchases made with at least 60% of donated funds are exempt from import duty under the Bermuda Customs Tariff, which can add up to significant savings for our hospitals.

The Bermuda Hospitals Charitable Trust is the formal charitable arm for accepting donations and fundraising on behalf of the Board. Through our relationship with the Trust, we are partnering with Bermuda's leading business minds from companies such as XL Capital, ACE Bermuda, Bank of Bermuda, Butterfield Bank and Belco for upcoming capital projects.

Although a not-for-profit entity, the BHB must generate income to meet the community's expectation for excellence in patient care. This allows us to invest in our employees, equipment, new services, technology and infrastructure.

It's important that we now build on our successes and embrace financial strategies that will see us in a healthy financial position for the next 10, 20 and 50 years.

This could mean shifting to more ambulatory care services as we have been doing, developing approaches that will reduce length of stay, or introducing new technologies that will result in long-term cost savings.

It is critical that we work very closely with physicians and other healthcare professionals as we make these decisions that will affect our service delivery.

WORKFORCE

This brings me to another key issue for our hospitals, human resources. The BHB employs a dedicated workforce of more than 1,400 permanent staff plus an additional 200 on-call locum staff, making us Bermuda's second largest employer. We have more than 200 positions – everything from nurses, physicians, technicians, orderlies to cooks, accountants, secretaries, housekeepers and computer technicians – making us one of the most, if not the most, diversified organisation in Bermuda.

The global shortage of health care professionals certainly affects us.

Although more than 40% of our staff have been with the Bermuda Hospitals Board for more than 10 years –lowering staff turnover and increasing recruitment are high on our agenda.

We are approaching this by encouraging open dialogue with our staff so we can better understand their specific issues and empower them to be part of the solution. In an organisation as diverse as ours, this is critical.

More qualified healthcare workers mean better patient care. For this reason, the Board is immediately focusing on retention to reduce our turnover rate.

We have several programmes in place to encourage Bermudians to consider careers in healthcare, and are also actively recruiting professionals in Canada, the United Kingdom, the Caribbean and Australia.

For over two decades, the BHB has granted scholarships on an annual basis to deserving Bermudian students. These funds are predominantly granted from an endowment fund, in addition to community support from GlaxoSmithKline and the Lady Swan scholarship.

The Board would welcome partnering with interested corporations or community organizations that would like to help us assist our future caregivers. There is a great opportunity to create an annual scholarship for medical students.

TECHNOLOGY

Keeping up to date with advances in technology is one way we can attract and retain the best and brightest health care workers.

Numerous studies have shown that hospitals that invest in technology have

- Improved clinical processes
- Increased revenues that can be reinvested into other areas of patient care, and
- Fewer errors

An example of technology at work in KEMH is telemedicine, one of the most exciting areas of medical technology. You may have read the article about this in last week's newspaper. Telemedicine connects health care providers around the world and enables information-sharing and immediate access to leading specialists across the world, and is now available at our hospitals.

For patients, an investment in technology means faster, more accurate diagnoses and an instant connection to medical resources at our partner hospitals.

For physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals, it means improved communication internally and with colleagues at other hospitals, and an improved ability to make diagnoses and treatment. To stay current, we have to view technology as a key component of the patient care experience. We have certainly started to do this, and must continue to do so.

INFRASTRUCTURE/ ESTATE MASTER PLAN

Another matter is the state of our infrastructure. As we all know, our buildings are in need of improvement. I talked about this when I last addressed the Rotary in 2003.

Since then, we have commissioned the estate master plan that will allow us to fully modernize our environment.

As you know, we held a series of town hall meetings in June to discuss our current hospitals' remaining lifespan and solicit feedback from the community on developing campuses of care in the western, central and eastern parts of the island, as well as site options for locating a new acute care hospital.

A new hospital is something that impacts all of us, and we felt it was very important to include our staff, various stakeholders and the community in the planning process.

In an effort to be as inclusive as possible, we held several open meetings and collected hundreds of feedback forms from the public. We've listened to what everyone had to say and are currently preparing a business case for a final estate master plan. There should be an update on this in the fall.

This plan will take time. In the meantime, we have prioritized our immediate renovation needs and are tending to them. Our new intensive care unit is a recent example of such a project, as is our updated laundry facility. The morgue is currently being renovated, and we expect this work to be completed in November. Our Facilities Department works on smaller projects throughout the hospitals on a daily basis.

There is no denying our buildings do pose challenges, but we work diligently to ensure that they do not interfere with the delivery of patient care. We are looking forward to sharing our final master plan for the future of the hospitals over the next few months.

PATIENT CARE

Although the state of our buildings is undoubtedly very important, it's what happens inside them that concerns us most.

While I'm proud of the care we offer our patients, I am also committed to making it better.

It happens too often that KEMH is operating at maximum capacity. When this happens, it places a great deal of stress on our system as we work to discharge existing patients and make room for new patients requiring acute care. It also points to a deeper problem.

The reality is that a significant percentage of our beds on medical wards are occupied by patients who are staying in the hospital for social as opposed to medical reasons. This means that the patient no longer requires acute care and is awaiting post-discharge services.

This is part of a larger national issue, and needs to be addressed on a broader scale. While we do have strategies in place at the hospital to address this issue such as a new rehabilitation service, we would like to be part of a group that includes Government, clinicians, community health agencies and social workers that will develop a plan for these individuals who require alternate care in the community.

It is our responsibility to provide the care and the resources that our population requires, and it's absolutely essential that we work together to achieve this.

Access, quality of care and patient safety are arguably emerging as some of the leading issues in hospitals around the world. The same applies for us.

Improving patient care is about creating an environment that is open to disclosure and committed to change. Now more than ever there will be a focused drive to address these issues consistently across the hospitals.

Part of this Board's mandate is keeping you informed about what is happening at the hospitals. Our new website, newsletters, town hall meetings and regular press releases are part of this effort, as are speaking opportunities such as this one.

Admittedly, the road ahead will be challenging. However, it is one that we gladly embark upon as we move forward with some very exciting progress at our hospitals that will ultimately change the face of healthcare in Bermuda.

I would be remiss to not extend my gratitude and sincere appreciation to our staff for their hard work, dedication and commitment to patient care. From the physicians to the management team to the nurses, technicians, cooks and everyone in between – the Board thanks its workforce for their deep commitment to patient care.

Anyone will tell you that the hospital environment is a challenging one. Each and every day, we deal with matters of life and death, pain and suffering, hope and joy as we help care for Bermuda's residents and visitors.

There are 1,600 people at the BHB who are there to take care of us when we need it and they deserve our recognition and thanks. It's too often that we, as a community, overlook their enormous contribution.

The Board looks forward to your support and understanding, and welcomes your constructive feedback about changes you'd like to see. Our hospitals belong to each of us – and we truly can make them better by working together.