

CEO News & Views

an update from Bruce Schroffel



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In This Issue

[Two telling weeks...](#)

[... and two patient surges](#)

[A fourth year](#)

[Teasing our leaders](#)



During the past weeks we've been witness to some traumatic events (a severe bed crunch that required some special organization to overcome and, one day later on December 20, the crash of Continental Flight 1404), some anxiety-producing events (the Joint Commission's visit), and some genuinely touching events. Taken together, they seemed to reveal something about the hospital.

Two weeks that signify a lot

I typically use this space to discuss the often-difficult health, business and ethical issues that we face in a broken health care system that, as if the gods decided to *really* challenge us, now also operates in a frozen financial market. So I'm confident we will have no shortage of stern challenges to discuss in this space in 2009.

But now I bring up the events of the last weeks because they signify something that none of us recognizes often enough:

We have reacted to whatever is thrown at us with nothing less than our best.

Not one, but two surges of patients

For example, on the morning of December 19 we found ourselves with a fully-occupied AIP and 65 more patients waiting to get in. By 9 a.m. people from Nursing, Medicine, the Emergency Department, the lab, Administration, Operations, Housekeeping, Guest Services, Supply Chain and more organized and got to work. They creatively solved what looked like an insolvable challenge by 3 p.m. that day. Moreover, they did it more-than-well. There was not the slightest interruption in our normal high levels of care.



A little more than 24 hours later, when Continental Flight 1404 bounced off a runway at DIA and caught fire, our people switched into urgent mode again. For all we knew, we were about to be overwhelmed with a surge of more than 100 injured people. Such prospects present enormous logistical as well as health care challenges. We met them, again, with aplomb. We quickly de-compressed the ED, and organized our caregivers and support staff to handle a surge in both patients and media

This holiday season also has featured a few incidents that, I admit, made it hard not to tear up a little. Consider, for example, the work of **Phyllis Hoskins**. For the past six years Phyllis, administrative assistant in UCH's Support Services office, has collected, made, and attracted donations of infant-sized presents that, once unwrapped by the NICU staff, are distributed to our Neonatal Intensive Care Unit babies throughout the year.

Phyllis does not have to do this. And, from what I hear of the emotional impact of last week's gift-opening, I'm sure she gets as much out of her generosity and effort as the babies and mothers who

directly benefit from her work. But, talk about making all things possible...

'Surprising' excitement.

Similarly, we got to deliver the results of the campus-wide book drive to Paris and Montview elementary schools last week. I have already thanked **Jeff Thompson, Chris Comer, Gaelen Quinlivan, Laurie Dickinson** and all the others who organized and contributed to our end of this community outreach. But when they got the books, the kids' excitement was loud, wonderful and, to those of us to whom books are common, surprising.

A disturbingly high number of the children said it was the first book they'd ever owned. We need to do more of this.

Then there was the employee breakfast and dinner we served on December 18. There is a management philosophy called "servant leadership," which rests on "serving" our colleagues as much as our colleagues are serving the mission of the organization.

This was not the first time we have taken

inquiries. In the end we took in nine passengers; happily, all but two were back on their way by dawn. Two others arrived in critical condition. (As of this writing, one has been upgraded to serious condition and the other to fair condition.)

A new norm. There are really too many people to cite for their great work during these alerts. I can't possibly mention all the people who jumped instantly to the aid of patients, rushed in from home, stayed beyond their shifts and even in one (non-clinical) case remained on the job for almost 24 straight hours. But that is the point: there are now so many giving and extraordinarily professional people at UCH that excellence has become a norm. None of it has come easily, and I want to make sure we never take it for granted.

My fourth year

I am about to start my fourth year at UCH. I've witnessed many changes. All of us have moved a whole hospital, made it into an efficient (and, I hope, more fun) place to work, turned a bleak budgetary 2007 into an astoundingly successful budgetary 2008, reached consistently superior medical outcomes levels in a growing number of care service lines, opened up communications and, among many other steps forward, have taken down a few silos within the organization. And, from my perch, I see us regularly meeting challenges like those of the past several weeks aggressively, calmly and at the highest imaginable level of professionalism. It does a president proud.

Teasing our leaders, too.

Much as we host holiday gatherings for all our colleagues, we also host a little December reception for UCH's managers, directors and vice presidents. Its highlight for the past two years has been skits written and performed by six of our colleagues -



Angela Lieurance (as COO John Harney, *left*), Steve Ringel, Allan Staver, Bill Sonn, Tyler Smith and Carolyn Sanders - that poke fun at all our leaders, including themselves.

Despite the obvious and grave risk to their careers, they take special pleasure in poking fun at me.

This year's theatrical misadventure concerned the search to replace Colleen Goode, our irreplaceable (but nonetheless retiring) chief nursing officer.

Although it ended in an offkey musical tribute to Colleen herself, it embodied many of the qualities I've come to love and encourage at UCH: creativity, fun, risk taking, self deprecation, pushing the envelope, and good judgment.

We are going to need those traits to attain our vision of being a top 10 hospital in all categories.

the "serving" idea literally, dishing out food and, we hope, holiday cheer. To me, however, it remains a meaningful way for all of us to get together, and for me and the hospital's leaders to publicly demonstrate how much we appreciate you and the work you do.

Here's to a warm, happy and joyful holiday, and to a healthy and prosperous new year for you and your loved ones.
Sincerely,



Bruce

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