

# CEO News & Views

an update from Bruce Schroffel



June 17, 2009

## This Week

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### **Kudos** **A budget early to bed**

Speaking of teamwork, we will soon be hearing from the Board of Directors about the budget for the next fiscal year, which begins in 13 days.

Shaping a budget that meets patient, clinical, and operational needs while meeting fiscal realities, as you know, means months of research, calculations and

## Happy anniversary!

Two years ago today, we completed the moves of all our inpatient care to the Anschutz Medical Campus.

If you remember - and I recall it all vividly - the move itself was a logistical triumph. Some 130 very sick people were transported the 6.2 miles to the Anschutz Inpatient Pavilion carefully, safely and without so much as a scratch. Getting them there was a lot harder than it sounds. It required an intricately timed dance of hundreds of people, big and small objects, tons of supplies and often-fragile technology, separated and efficiently brought together again.

**A lone casualty.** The only unscheduled events of the move were when a patient at Ninth decided to take a long walk on a nice day without our permission, and when, at Anschutz, a small blanket, inadvertently left on a warmer while we were unpacking, started to smoke. The patient was quickly (and relievedly) retrieved without wear. The blanket, however, became the exercise's lone casualty.

But it was also a very difficult time. And, boy, have we come a long way.

negotiations. We were able to finish them earlier than usual.

So kudos to CFO **Anthony DeFurio** (below), Controller **Dan Rieber** and the finance team - plus all those in all our units, clinics and



practices who worked hard to complete this

brain-teasing work - for helping to put the budget to bed early.

We'll talk about the Board's deliberations in the next *CEO News & Views*.

### **Kudos**

## **We made it... and how!**

I'm very pleased to note that, as of this writing, 88% of the nurses who qualified to take the annual RN Survey did so. Our ambitious goal, as you know, was 80%. We achieved "only" 54% participation last year.

A healthy turnout is critical to something



*The Emergency Department sign came down at 9th two years ago this week, and Tony Ruiz, who directed the move and, among other things, "saved" a certain CEO in a strange dream (see Best of Times, below) met the press.*

## **Best of times, worst of times**

If you also remember - and I recall the period's uncertainties just as vividly as the triumphs - our hospital was in difficult financial and operational straits. I, for one, especially remember a nightmare about people chasing me with spears, and my looking desperately for Vice President of Operations Tony Ruiz for protection as I hid under desks and ducked through hallways.

The dream wasn't far from what we were living at the time, for the enormous expenses of the move and of operating two campuses had caught up to us. There were painful reductions in force, two rounds of budget cuts and not a few worries about whether patients and referring physicians really would follow us. Several of our spiffy new systems bent under the strain of accommodating a suddenly bigger, more widespread hospital. And there was an emotional toll. Many not only mourned the closing of the old but familiar Ninth Avenue hospital, but also felt a little lost working in new teams on the much bigger, unfamiliar new campus.

Not coincidentally, our patient satisfaction scores promptly fell to unacceptable levels.

## **Improvement, and then some**

I'm not sure when the bad dreams stopped, but I think of those first six months in our new buildings as a time of making our new environment work for us.

We have long since overcome almost all of those initial, often knotty challenges. And then some.

**All systems go.** As our anniversary on the Anschutz Medical Campus approached, for example, we received a report that our patient

else that's very important: an effort to become one of the very few (about 20) hospitals in the United States to be designated as a Magnet hospital three consecutive times. The effort began some time ago, and will climax in the fall.

So thank you **Danielle Schloffman, Carolyn Sanders,** all the folks who rounded through the hospital promoting the survey and all the RNs who, despite busy schedules, took the time to give us their thoughts about our hospital.

## Something On Your Mind?

[Talk to me](#)

satisfaction scores jumped again across the board in the outpatient, inpatient and Emergency Department sectors.

Our outcomes data indicate our quality remains among the best in the country. The Joint Commission has gone out of its way to call us "world class," and various credentialing agencies and payers keep upgrading our status in stroke, the neurosciences, cancer, cardiac and transplant, among others.



Financially, we are about to complete the best year in the hospital's history. We're among a small group of hospitals to actually have our bonds upgraded. We did it, moreover, in the midst of one of the deepest, most frightening economic downturns in the nation's history.

We may not yet be all the way up where we want to be in patient satisfaction and even quality, but we are back among the best.

By all measures, moreover, employee satisfaction and commitment have never been higher (and turnover rates never lower).

### Why "great" is hard

Perhaps a little more subjectively, I also like to think that we are a more collegial, comfortable, transparent, and even pleasant place to work and provide care.

I'd argue that none of those things could have happened in a vacuum. What makes being a great hospital so hard in the first place is that no single advance in patient care or finance or employee engagement or anywhere could happen without equal advances in operations, the lab, the med school, nursing, communications, food service and by all the other diverse players in our complex organization. And *vice versa*. If any one of us fails to work together, we make improvement by any one of us more unlikely. These last two years have proven that, when we work together, there's very little the talented people of the University of Colorado Hospital can't do.

### A remarkable two years

So, on our two-year anniversary, we really do have a lot to be thankful for and a lot of reasons to be proud.

But before we get hurt patting ourselves on the back, let me remind you that I have not been shy about being a worrywart. I am by habit the kind of guy who frets that a sense of well-being is likely to be a prelude to the sky falling in. But, with full understanding that there will always be worrisome financial, operational and academic challenges to our hospital and our colleagues, I can't help but look back in gratitude to you (meaning faculty, nurses and employees; everyone), our patients, vendors, and, not least, family members, for a really remarkable two years of growth and success.

Sincerely,



Bruce

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