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Athol Daily News Business Review Article

Athol Memorial Hospital

We make a great team.

By Marcia Maglione Flynn, Community Relations Manager

When Athol Memorial Hospital opened on September 10, 1950, it not only stepped into place as the North Quabbin's major healthcare facility, but also as one of the region's biggest employers. Today Athol Memorial Hospital is the area's second largest employer, with a staff of 252, which includes full-time, part-time, and per diem members.

Medicine has dramatically changed since our first patient came through the door over fifty-six years ago. Health insurers oversee diagnoses for patient admissions and limits on length of stay. Administrative costs, in the face of ever-increasing state and federal regulations, have swelled. More time and effort is spent on the intricacies of billing and collecting third party payments. Shrinking reimbursements, combined with escalating staff and equipment expenses, have forced the closure of many hospitals, and the majority of Massachusetts' hospitals regularly operate with a deficit budget.

Athol Memorial Hospital, however, has deftly managed to navigate these challenges, make significant improvements to our facility and services, and maintain a positive bottom line for six consecutive years. When you step through the doors of today's Athol Memorial Hospital you will find state-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment capabilities, a wide scope of inpatient and outpatient services, and a knowledgeable staff committed to providing high quality healthcare in a community hospital setting.

The hospital has consistently earned high praises from surveyors during JCAHO (Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations) and other regulatory reviews, and the recent attainment of Critical Access Hospital status has strategically positioned Athol Memorial Hospital for a solid future. None of this, of course, would be possible without the dedication and hard work of our staff members, the savvy leadership of our administrators and Board of Trustees, and the commitment of our volunteers and Auxiliary. Reviewers' comments at the conclusion of each survey affirm our high standards of healthcare delivery, well-maintained facility, and most notably, exceptional teamwork.

"We make a great team" is our motto, and it is probably familiar if you've seen or heard any of our advertising these past few years. The

decision to use the phrase so prominently in our advertising actually originated with the repeated emphasis expressed during JCAHO, and other, subsequent, exit interviews.

The greater Athol Memorial Hospital team is comprised of many individual departmental teams, working together in a multidisciplinary framework. Clinical teams provide direct patient care. These teams include, but are not limited to, our physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, phlebotomists, pharmacists, physical, occupational, speech therapists, and social workers. Non-clinical departments, such as Central Registration, Health Information Management Systems (commonly referred to as Medical Records), and Facilities Engineering, again to name only a few, provide the necessary infrastructure and support to care for our patients.

An illustrious example interdisciplinary teamwork at Athol Memorial Hospital is our Oncology Clinic. The clinic, which celebrated twenty years this past fall, provides chemotherapy treatment and hematology services to cancer patients, in a supportive, caring environment close to home. A typical patient visit to the clinic includes encounters with our oncology specialty physician, Saleem Khanani, MD, nurse manager, Les Henley, RN, staff nurses, Elaine Heath, RN and Joyce Sawyer, RN, as well as social worker Bonnie Frank Hume, LICSW.

A consultation with hospital dietician Marjorie Sobil, RD, will be included as needed, and the patient will find support and comfort from any of our oncology volunteers (Marsha Bray, June Fournier, Pat Tedford, and Diane Wood). The hospital's Pharmacy Department (Alayne Stone, RPH and Angela Killay, CPHT) under the direction of manager Peg St. Amand, RPH, prepares in advance of the patient's visit by checking patient profiles against physicians' orders, entering the orders into the computer, and rechecking them before and after they mix solutions and place them with the unit.

Meanwhile, Materials Management, under the direction of Tim Herk, oversees requisitioning from vendors and dispensing throughout the hospital the majority of supplies and equipment needed to treat all of our patients and keep all departments running. Facilities Engineering is responsible for inspecting and maintaining medical equipment, such as the IV pumps used in treatment. Mary Ellen Scribner, Oncology Secretary, provides the administrative clerical support crucial to run the department.

The example of a team approach to medicine is not unique to our oncology clinic, or even our hospital. I do think, however, that our institutional identity and culture is quite special. And there are a number of

reasons why working here, and being part of this hospital's team, offers particular circumstances and rewards.

Athol Memorial Hospital is deeply connected to the community. The hospital was born of community need and effort, and saved and supported by community generosity in darker times. Most of our patients and staff live in the local area, and someone treated at the hospital today might be in the grocery line next week. Neighbors care for neighbors, and there is an investment in the institution by patients and staff alike.

Unlike larger hospital facilities, with multilevel organizational structures, staff members at Athol Memorial Hospital have ready access to their supervisors and administrators. The hospital actively encourages continuing education and learning, and cross training experiences, particularly in the nursing department, are regular components of staff education. There is an overall collegial atmosphere, transcending individual departments, and reinforces the fact that we are all working at this, together.

Tim Herk, Materials Management Manager, has worked at Athol Memorial Hospital for over forty years. He started his career here in Laboratory Services, where he stayed for 27 years, before moving into the purchasing department and then his current position. When I recently asked him about his longevity and loyalty, he replied, "I like working somewhere where I can make a difference to people in my community. Athol Memorial's patients are not someone you might not ever see again, but the same folks you will see out in the community. There is a strong sense of ownership, personal and shared responsibility in caring for our patients. I am especially proud of the excellence of care we offer, across the board, to our patients and community."

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