

Hospital View: Care, Service and Technology

Interview with Kathy Van Camp

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Interviewer: John Walter, TMTG

JW: What strategies do hospitals employ to market clinical services to referring physicians and patients?

KV: Hospital marketing efforts have to reflect the community served and the competitive options available to the patients. This hospital is the only acute care hospital in the county and is located in a residential area. The county is the third wealthiest in the country, but half of the served population represents blue collar workers. We have to offer a wide-array of technology to appeal to such a varied patient mix. Every hospital has similar challenges, so its marketing efforts reflect its local needs.

JW: Do patients directly request specific equipment?

KV: Patients are consumers and increasingly knowledgeable ones. They will call the radiology department and ask for specific vendor equipment. We have to be able to explain our product choice. If we are using equipment that is not as advanced as what they seek, we have to explain the rationale and the clinical consequences of our choice. We tend to purchase equipment that positions this hospital as one of the region's best, so our marketing materials may demonstrate the benefits of the technology choice.

JW: In what ways will patients influence the purchase of specific diagnostic equipment?

KV: We have to provide the clinical services so that patients want to come to us. With our relatively close proximity to New York City, patients have choices. The presence of competitive options directly stimulates our investment in technology. Our cancer patients, for example, may be lured to Memorial Sloan-Kettering for diagnostic services. We have to provide a combination of competitive technology and service to keep the patients local.

JW: What role do physicians play in your technology investment plans?

KV: A key source of information for the patient comes from consulting with their physician. We have to provide the technology that our specialists view as clinically valuable. We aren't striving to purchase bleeding edge technology, but we will invest to support best practices. Matching the investment size with appropriate technology level is a tough challenge. Our clinicians actively help guide the hospital through the equipment labyrinth. Our purchase of a 3T MRI and our upgrading of our 32-slice CT to 64-slices are examples of our commitment to making the clinically and community justified technology investment.

JW: Are physicians the spokespersons for patient preference on technology?

KV: Physicians are the patient's advocate more than the spokesperson. They seek the diagnostic technology that effectively guides therapeutic decisions. They seek therapeutic technology that provides the best outcomes. Physicians will repeat patient concerns relative to service — i.e. long waiting lines, poor surgical experiences, etc.

Patients and their physicians will express interest in specific diagnostic services. Breast cancer is a key concern among our patients. We have attracted

two leading breast imaging physicians to the area. Our purchase of the 3T MRI reflects the joint patient and physician desire for more sensitive and specific testing.

JW: How important is the technology investment choice to patients?

KV: From our patients' perspective, high service level trumps technology. An institution with the latest technology but with long waiting lines or uncomfortable rooms will have lower patient satisfaction than one with superior service and moderate technology. We are in the unique position of offering both high service and good technology. Many community hospitals recognize this challenge of balancing technology with service. In response to our community's needs, we have just opened an E/R department that covers nearly one acre with 52 individual private rooms. It has dedicated imaging equipment and relies on an integrated electronic health record with PACS (Picture Archival Communication System). We recognize the need to serve emergent patients quickly while providing the best diagnostic care in the region.



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