

AN UNPRECEDENTED ACHIEVEMENT

Case Study

100 Top Hospitals

NorthShore University HealthSystem

NorthShore has done what no other hospital in the country has — achieved the 100 Top Hospitals®: National Benchmarks award 13 times.

A comprehensive, fully integrated healthcare delivery system that includes four hospitals, 2,400 affiliated physicians, and 8,000 employees, NorthShore University HealthSystem (NorthShore) in Evanston, Ill., is also the principal teaching affiliate of the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine.

Since first winning the National award in 1994, the system has implemented several major projects including an electronic medical records (EMR) system, bar-coding technology, and efforts to fight hospital-acquired methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infections. These projects have demonstrated the strength of NorthShore's leadership, a solid business strategy, and a commitment to sustained performance improvement.

The 100 Top Hospitals National award is designed, in part, to measure the success of leadership strategies and executive decision making. As a 13-time award winner, NorthShore has demonstrated that its leadership, both physician and executive, is exceptional.

According to Mark Neaman, CEO, NorthShore University HealthSystem, physician and executive leadership are two of the most important factors in the successful implementation of any project, no matter the scope. Physician leaders and executive



team members may have different perspectives that provide a richer background than either group could alone use to solve problems and identify potential issues. Hospital leaders need both sides of the story to reach the best possible solution.

"We refuse to accept the status quo and realize that healthcare delivery in the U.S. is not as good as it needs to be. It is our job to be cognizant of what we can do to improve, and never settle for less than the best."

Mark Neaman

CEO

NorthShore University HealthSystem



NORTHSHORE UNIVERSITY HEALTHSYSTEM

Location:
Evanston, Ill.

Category:
Major Teaching Hospital

Awards:
100 Top Hospitals®:
National Benchmarks
1994-2002, 2004-05, 2007-08

Scope and services:
NorthShore University HealthSystem is a comprehensive, fully integrated healthcare delivery system that includes four hospitals, 8,000 employees, and more than 2,400 affiliated physicians. It is the principal teaching affiliate of the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine.



“It takes more than physician leaders — it takes physician champions. Champions understand the vision and provide the leadership and enthusiasm essential for a successful project. It’s relatively easy to identify a champion for a project, but with more than 2,400 physicians on staff, the hard part is getting everyone on board. That is where a champion comes in,” says Neaman.

Champions are necessary for building interest in important projects throughout the organization. They can also help foster understanding of the project’s goals by communicating to hospital staff so they understand their role in the project. Beyond champions, the support of the hospital board is also essential.

“Change can seem threatening, even if it is for everyone’s benefit. It’s important to make your vision and the reasons behind it as clear as possible. Implementing a project as large and extensive as our EMR system affects everyone in the organization. The stakes are high for a successful outcome, and that can be stressful for all stakeholders,” says Neaman.

SOLID BUSINESS STRATEGY

The 100 Top Hospitals®: National Benchmarks award measures hospital performance on a balanced scorecard of nine financial and clinical metrics, including mortality, complications, patient safety, core measures, length of stay, expense per discharge, profitability, cash-to-total-debt ratio, and overall patient satisfaction.

The scorecard spans measures of both cost and quality, so NorthShore’s success has depended on maintaining consistent improvement in both areas. Key to this performance is a belief that cost and quality are not mutually exclusive and can be improved simultaneously.

“Throughout our system, we focus on preventing errors before they occur. This strategy guides our decision-making at all levels of the organization and helps us improve quality and manage costs at the same time,” says Neaman.

This philosophy has guided NorthShore through an unprecedented 13 100 Top Hospitals National awards. The system is dedicated to maintaining its status as one of the preeminent health systems in the country through a proactive approach to preventable errors and the implementation of several innovative and expansive projects.

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

NorthShore is a healthcare information technology leader. In 2003, it was one of the first in the country to successfully launch a system-wide electronic medical records (EMR) system with demonstrable benefits in quality, safety, efficiency, and service to patients. Today, NorthShore is a top-ranked “Stage 7” EMR system award-winner, as recognized by the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS).

Implementing EMR required the planning and participation of everyone at NorthShore, from the chairman of the board to hospital staff. The EMR system is now the cornerstone of the cost and quality achievements that have made NorthShore a top performer and will continue to support the hospital’s future performance improvement endeavors.

The EMR system has evolved to include new technologies as they become available. The recent addition of bar-coding technology allows for seamless coordination between a patient’s medical records file and the medication delivery system. Nurses at the point of care scan a bar code to obtain information related to a patient’s history and medication needs. This process reduces medication errors while improving quality and patient safety. Through both electronic ordering and bar coding for medication administration, medication errors have dropped by 80 percent. For patients requiring antibiotics, NorthShore reduced the time from their first encounter to drug administration by 60 percent — to 70 minutes.

To further prevent avoidable errors, NorthShore developed a process to reduce the number of hospital-acquired MRSA infections. A small percentage of the U.S. population carries the MRSA bacteria. NorthShore screens all patients before admission to determine if they are an MRSA carrier. If so, hospital staff take additional precautions during treatment to avoid infection of and exposure to other patients. NorthShore decreased MRSA infections by over 70 percent through this comprehensive testing program.



“Whether it is our EMR system, bar-coding technology, or the steps we’ve taken to fight MRSA infections, we focus on systems and processes that provide hard data. We use these data to understand our performance, adjust processes, and demonstrate that we have fewer errors, improved patient safety, and a solid bottom line,” says Neaman.

These projects encompass both the business and clinical strategies necessary to achieve the 100 Top Hospitals® National award, and most of all, represent improvements that are transparent and measurable. By focusing on measurable goals, progress can be documented and communicated to internal and external stakeholders.

THE JOURNEY AHEAD

It is clear that after 13 awards, NorthShore has chosen to proactively pursue improvement rather than become complacent about its achievements.

“We refuse to accept the status quo and realize that healthcare delivery in the U.S. is not as good as it needs to be. It is our job to be cognizant of what we can do to improve, and never settle for less than the best,” says Neaman.

The system plans to stay ahead of the curve by continuing to invest in meaningful technology that improves care, manages costs, and maintains the hospital’s position among the best in the nation. NorthShore will also remain committed to proactive strategies that prevent errors before they occur and provide the best care possible to patients.

“Achieving the 100 Top Hospitals award 13 times demonstrates our consistency and perseverance. This award measures much more than checking a box on a form or a perception of what we do. It is the strongest evidence that we are performing well and is the highest accolade we could receive,” says Neaman.

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