

October 1, 1997

Lehigh Valley Hospital • Muhlenberg Hospital Center

■ What's Up?

An article in *The Morning Call* Monday indicated that the Pennsylvania Attorney General's antitrust division has imposed conditions that could abort a proposed merger of two Erie hospitals. The same article said that officials at St. Luke's Hospital are questioning the legality of the MHC/LVH merger, citing antitrust concerns. The two situations should not be compared; each case of this kind is based on its own merit. We are doing everything necessary to satisfy the requirements of the law, according to legal counsel.

■ Rumor Control -- Call 402-CARE

Rumor: Muhlenberg Hospital Center will keep its name.

Fact: Yes, that's true. After the merger is finalized, MHC will stay at its current location as an inpatient facility, and as a part of Lehigh Valley Health Network, serving Bethlehem and the surrounding community. It will keep the name Muhlenberg Hospital Center.

Rumor: LVH executives toured MHC last week to "size the place up" after the JCAHO survey, as a first step to taking over.

Fact: Not true. The tours were just tours -- "get-to-know-you" walk-throughs that happened right after the Monday morning merger transition team meeting in MHC's board room because everyone was conveniently assembled in one place. MHC team members also toured LVH last week in several "waves." Many of the team members had never been in each other's facility.

Rumor: Pay scales at LVH and MHC will be the same.

Fact: Anti-trust law forbids us from sharing information and making decisions about salaries until after the merger is finalized in mid- to late November. Then there will be a complete analysis, including market comparisons. In all cases involving personnel issues, decisions will be guided by key principles of individual respect, fairness, equity and integrity.

Rumor: If things are slow in a department at Muhlenberg, staff will be able to "float" to LVH, and vice versa.

Fact: Certainly not before the merger. After the merger, we will have ample time to seek input from employees on a policy that creates flexibility in staffing while maintaining high-quality patient care and sensitivity to employee inconvenience. Our goal is to capitalize on the talents and interests of our staffs and create more career options as a result of the merger.

Rumor: An MHC employee who transfers to LVH will lose seniority.

Fact: If any employee from either LVH or MHC transferred to the other organization, that employee would have to be treated as an external hire. What will happen after the merger will be part of the personnel policy analysis that will take place at that time.

Rumor: Patient centered care (PCC) will now be implemented at MHC.

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Fact: There have been no decisions made about PCC at Muhlenberg. Staff at MHC are actively involved in decisions about improvements to health care delivery. At LVH, PCC has significantly improved the quality of care and service as well as satisfaction scores, with staff actively involved in the work redesign process. The real issue here is that both organizations share that common goal: continual improvement to increase patient, staff and physician satisfaction.

Rumor: LVH is looking for other hospitals to merge with.

Fact: There are no more mergers either planned or in the works. But with health care in a constant state of transition, it's certain we will face other opportunities, and each will be evaluated on its own merits in its own time. MHC and LVH made the decision to merge because of a mutual belief that a stronger organization would result, better able to manage costs and improve the community's access to the best possible care. It evolved from a three-year affiliation that successfully launched joint ventures in home health, women's health services and health care for seniors.

■ JCAHO Survey at MHC

The preliminary report from the three-day JCAHO survey of MHC, which ended on Sept. 19, is very good. Surveyors were impressed overall, with one surveyor noting that the hospital's environment of care plan and performance improvement plan were the best they had seen to date. The hospital has achieved three-year accreditation and the preliminary grid score is in the high 90s.

■ Update on Psychiatry

The joint assessment of inpatient psychiatry at MHC and LVH will be completed by Jan. 1. Once the merger is finalized, a decision must be made quickly as to whether there will be one or two inpatient psych units. Meetings to discuss options and review assessments are planned for early October, to include each CEO and the chairman or chief of psychiatry from MHC and LVH.

■ Patient Care Services

Several new R.N. and nursing assistant positions have been approved at MHC, and are being posted today. Decisions to increase staff were made in response to volume issues and patient care needs, and are unrelated to the merger.

■ Employee Recreation Committee

Fun, trips, parties, dances and more! That's the agenda for the Employee Recreation Committee at LVH. MHC employees may call Barrie Borger, chair, at 402-1451, for more information or to discuss possible activities after the merger is finalized.

■ A Line or 2 from Lou

The question continues to be raised: How is this merger different than others, notably the Horizon and HealthEast experiences? Truly, it's hard to put them in the same category. The times are so different, and our organizations have changed so dramatically. The opportunities -- and the risks -- are greater than ever, so the stakes are that much higher to make this merger a successful, synergistic partnership. Both organizations come at this from a unique vantage point -- we've been through it before, in one form or another, and we've learned some lessons about what to do and what not to do. We have also had the opportunity to work together over the past three years on several successful endeavors that now pave the way to create a new and stronger organization. We **cannot** focus on the merger and each other as the enemy; that only leaves us vulnerable to the hostile forces of the marketplace. We **can** act as a team, support each other and strive for the enormous success that is well within our reach.



Lou Liebhaber
Chief Operating Officer, LVH
Chair, Merger Transition Team