

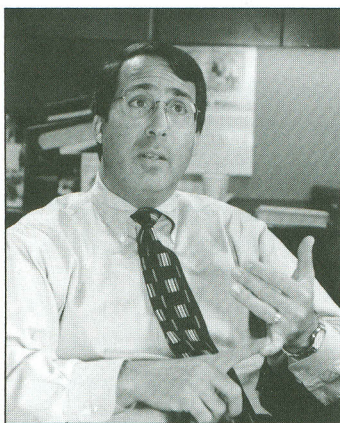
# Issues & Initiatives

Issues & Initiatives is a series of activities providing employees information about current health care issues and Lehigh Valley Hospital / Lehigh Valley Health Network initiatives.

JULY 1995

## Issue:

### *Primary Care Physicians: Partners for Prevention*



Most of us don't remember what it was like to have a family doctor whose office was down the street and who cared for all of our health needs. That doctor

is part of our parents' memories or, perhaps, just an image we recall from an old television series. We've become used to going directly to a specialist, stopping at the family doctor — or primary care physician, in today's terms — only for a referral.

But now, as the health care industry undergoes a philosophical shift from the traditional inward-looking orientation of "sick care" to focus on wellness and disease prevention or "health care", the primary care physician is reclaiming an expanded role. This role has the primary care physician as pivotal in partnership with the hospital, the individual and the community.

As that happens, we see that when the primary care physician becomes a patient's entry point into the health care system and the focal point of health care, the emphasis is on both comprehensiveness and continuity — and an environment of comprehensive and continuous care is one in which wellness and prevention can thrive. It is also an environment in which patients and primary care physicians can make informed decisions together. These decisions may include the need for a specialist, or the need for a new exercise and diet regimen or other preventive care.

Because of this philosophical shift, it's important for Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network to build strong relationships with those who can offer prevention and wellness resources. Such relationships with physicians and hospital staff help us reach out to our communities as a "hospital without walls." This is how we build healthy communities.

And as we make this important shift to a focus on wellness and disease prevention in our communities, we see real benefits. We see the benefit of lower costs. Smoking cessation efforts, for example, are far less expensive than treating lung cancer, while proper prenatal care can prevent the costs associated with neonatal intensive care services. Moreover, prevention is ultimately the most effective care. We improve the health of our communities.

By forging a partnership among Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network, primary care physicians and our communities, we ease the transition from the old acute-care orientation to the new philosophy and practice of wellness and prevention. In the end, we will not just lower costs, but improve the quality and effectiveness of health care.

Lou Liebhaber

## Initiative:

### *Community Coalitions*

Each day, Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network becomes more of a "hospital without walls." We become more a multidisciplinary preventive care resource that extends beyond its walls to influence better health directly throughout the community. And the way we reach beyond

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**LEHIGH VALLEY**  
HOSPITAL



our walls is by building coalitions with community organizations, educational and government institutions, businesses and other health organizations throughout the Valley — all focused on improving the health and well being of our residents.

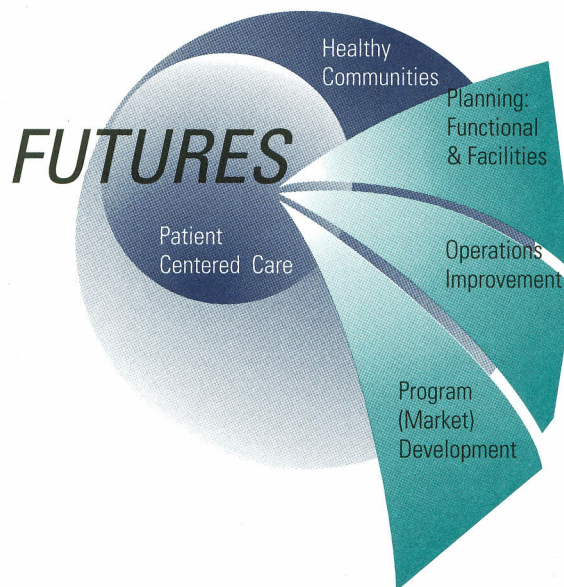
The Perinatal Partnership is a good example of our success. The partnership is a community-based outreach effort that links us, state and local agencies, public and private funders and charitable organizations. The partnership seeks to make prenatal care available to all low-income women and, ultimately, to reduce the incidence of infant mortality in the Lehigh Valley. Outreach workers meet prospective patients in the community at places like Casa Guadalupe, a Latino community center; the Sixth Street Shelter for the homeless; Turning Point, a shelter for abused women; or Pathways, which helps families in transition.

The program reaches an average of more than 400 patients a year and, since its inception in November 1991, has had contact with more than 1,500 patients. Referrals from its partner agencies have increased from 165 in fiscal year 1992 to 228 in 1994.

Another success is the Burn Prevention Foundation which, in partnership with the Lehigh Valley Hospital Burn Center, last year reached more than 150,000 school children, senior citizens, mobility-disabled people, school nurses and health care professionals and paraprofessionals with important education programs. Another example: the Coalition for a Smoke-Free Valley is a community coalition whose goals are to reduce tobacco use and raise public awareness about the hazards of environmental tobacco smoke pollution. The organization develops and implements youth prevention and tobacco treatment programs.

Of course, many of our community efforts are centered on ways to improve the health of our children. That's why we're actively involved in ALERT Partnership, a broad-based, community-driven coalition whose mission is to prevent the illegal use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. ALERT endorses, supports and assists communities to develop prevention strategies that lead to drug-free and safe neighborhoods. Other partnerships include the Infant Immunization Coalition in Allentown; Project Child, which works to prevent child abuse; the SAFE KIDS Coalition, which, in conjunction with Lehigh Valley Hospital Neurosciences and Trauma Centers, is making bicycle helmets more affordable for area youth; and the Cities in Schools program, a non-profit partnership that is educating at-risk high school students at the hospital and other sites.

Our role as a multidisciplinary preventive care resource is also illustrated by our pediatric dentistry program, organized with the Allentown School District to provide



free dental services to children who otherwise might not have received them. And with our Central School Project, also organized with the Allentown School District, we have provided the school with a full-time nurse and part-time educator/project manager to help address student health problems and the effects of those problems on the ability to learn.

Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network has spearheaded Lehigh Valley HeartBeat 2000, a population-based approach to reducing cardiovascular disease. It is led by a partnership planning group comprised of health care, business, education, government and civic organizations. And there is NEXUS for Geriatric Planning, a voluntary alliance providing education and information to members who advocate an improved quality of life for the aging population and care givers of the Lehigh Valley.

In addition, being a hospital without walls means that we cover a large area of the community to offer hundreds of health-related classes and seminars, as well as health fairs for area businesses. These are offered through our Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Department, which has been helping people for the last 15 years adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

For our co-workers in departments like Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, the importance of building coalitions with our communities is obvious everyday. But wherever we work, we must remember that building healthy communities is part of our mission. Indeed, the principle of healthy communities, together with patient centered care, is at the very core of what we do at Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network. And that's important to each of us—as employees and as community members.