

Forming Strategic Partnerships across the Continuum of Care

BY WILLIAM H. CONSIDINE, FACHE, AKRON CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Since it was founded in 1890 as a nursery, Akron Children's Hospital has evolved into the largest pediatric healthcare system in northeast Ohio, operating two pediatric hospitals, nearly 30 pediatrician offices, and about 60 urgent and specialty care locations across the region.

Our pediatric clinicians provided more than 1,000,000 patient visits last year, drawing infants, children, teens, and adults from across the country and around the world.

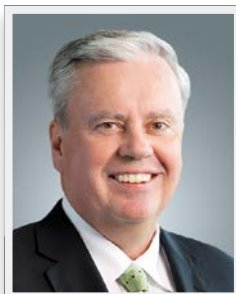
Although we touch the lives of thousands of families each year by providing children with quality, family-centered care, our mission goes beyond traditional patient care activities. We strive to enhance the quality of life for all children by keeping them healthy, happy, and safe through an array of programs and outreach activities in collaboration with healthcare networks, community organizations, and businesses at the local, state, and national level.

Mission-Driven Initiatives

Akron Children's founders endeavored to keep three promises to the children for whom they cared: 1) we promise to treat every child that comes through these doors as if that child is our own; 2) we promise to treat you the way you want to be treated; and 3) we promise never to turn a child away for any reason. Although the cost of care at Akron Children's is no longer 10 cents a day, I can tell you those promises are still alive and well.

We start every board meeting by reviewing those promises, followed by our mission and vision statements. Our mission is fivefold: to provide family-centered medical care, multi-level professional education, basic and clinical research, community service, and child and family advocacy efforts.

As a value-based, mission-focused organization, Akron Children's and its board focus



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on fulfilling the five areas of its mission when forming strategic partnerships with non-hospital and other service organizations.

Education

Education is very important to us. As such, we have great relationships with the universities in the area and are a major teaching affiliate of

Northeast Ohio Medical University, which our board was involved in forming more than 40 years ago. These relationships help us train future generations of pediatricians and specialists.

Our educational endeavors even reach as far as Haiti, where Akron Children's has been working with St. Damien Pediatric Hospital near Port-au-Prince since the 2010 earthquake. What began as an outreach effort to help care for the quake's youngest victims has evolved into a partnership including a network of 10 U.S. children's hospitals that support St. Damien by creating a pediatric residency program, and



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Key Board Takeaways

Healthcare boards should consider the following advice when forming strategic partnerships with non-hospital organizations and other services across the continuum of care:

- Review your vision and mission statements often.
- Consider whether a partnership will advance your organization's mission and vision.
- Measure your organization's bottom line by your mission.

sponsoring and training the country's first pediatric cardiologist.

But, investment in education has to extend beyond colleges and medical schools.

Akron Children's also operates school health services in nearly 30 school districts by providing pediatric registered nurses and school aides. These nurses and aides work with school staffs to ensure a comprehensive school health program is in place.

Additionally, Akron Children's and Akron Public Schools are partnering to create a healthcare academy at North High School and further develop offerings to expose high school students to careers in health systems.

Research

When you see as many patients as we do, you need to have the discipline to look at what's causing disease, what can be done to treat it, and what can be done to prevent it. Therefore, research is key to what we do and how we do it.

To this end, we are working to immunize more children and are looking at preventive measures we can take in areas such as the opioid epidemic and youth violence. We work in partnership with local health departments, regulatory and judicial agencies, and organizations such as the Child Advocacy Center. The center provides medical and forensic evaluations for children and teens who may have been physically or sexually abused, as well as complete medical evaluations for children in foster care.

Community

Akron Children's was founded on the principle of serving the needs of our community, which means treating all children as if

they were our own and turning no child or family away based on their ability to pay.

In the community, living up to this principle means providing children and families with access to more than 30 support groups and offering more than 300 programs, services, and activities that improve access to healthcare services, enhance public health, advance medical or health knowledge, and relieve or reduce the burden of government or other community efforts.

For example, Akron Children's collaborates with local public health departments to conduct community health assessments to gauge the welfare of children within communities and identify needs that must be addressed.

We also sponsor health and wellness-related events in the community, such as the Akron Children's Hospital Akron Marathon Race Series, which draws more than 15,000 runners together, and the Holiday Tree Festival, which is the first big event held each year in the community to kick off the holiday season.

In addition, we offer volunteer opportunities for our employees to build houses with Habitat for Humanity and work with our local food bank. When you have a workforce of around 6,000 folks, it's great

to get them involved in the communities we serve. The more people give, the more they receive.

Advocacy

Children need a champion, and Akron Children's takes its role as a leading advocate for children's health issues seriously by using our adult voices to speak up on their behalf.

In addition to advocating for programs, legislation, and funding resources on a local, state, and national level, Akron Children's partners with healthcare networks, businesses, and community and government organizations on quality-of-life issues.

Examples of these partnerships include Aluminum Cans for Burned Children, which raises money to help burn survivors and their families by funding educational and support programs and paying for non-medical items or services not covered by insurance. Another example is Reach Out and Read, a national program dedicated to fostering early literacy among children as a standard part of pediatric primary care.

The Bottom Line

As the proverb says, it takes a village to raise a child, and Akron Children's is just

one element within that village. Being a children's hospital, we're committed to doing the very best for children every day and treating them as you would want your own child to be treated. Therefore, we partner with organizations that will help us provide a safety net for children.

From the board's perspective, it's important to keep asking the question: Is there more we could and should do relative to fulfilling the vision of the people who founded our organization, advancing quality work, and investing in our people so they can be their very best?

The work we do is privileged because it's all about serving others. The bottom line of a healthcare organization—and that of its board—should be measured by your mission and not strictly by your financial results. The better you are at your mission, your financial bottom line will take care of itself. ●

The Governance Institute thanks William H. Considine, FACHE, President and CEO of Akron Children's Hospital, for contributing this article. He can be reached at wconsidine@chmca.org.