



1999 Award Winner

SSM HEALTH CARE



Sponsored by the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, and based in St. Louis, SSM Health Care (SSMHC) is one of the largest Catholic health care systems in the country. The system owns, operates and manages 20 acute care hospitals and three nursing homes in four states: Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Oklahoma.

Nearly 5,000 affiliated physicians and 20,000 employees work together to provide a wide range of services, including rehabilitation, pediatric, home health, hospice, residential and skilled nursing care. The system's health-related businesses include information systems and support services, such as material management. SSMHC also owns an interest in Premier Insurance Agency in Wisconsin and Community Care in Oklahoma -- both managed care organizations.

The system, with a long tradition of community involvement and caring for those in need, participates in regional integrated health care networks, which strive to improve the overall health of people within their communities.



In St. Louis, for example, seven SSMHC entities in partnership with physicians have formed SSM Health Care St. Louis. In Oklahoma City, four SSMHC hospitals belong to SSM Health Care of Oklahoma, Inc. In southern Wisconsin, SSM Health Care of Wisconsin includes the two hospitals and two nursing homes owned and operated by SSMHC. In southern Illinois, two hospitals, one owned by SSMHC and the other by Felician Services Inc. are operating as a single organization, St. Mary's Good Samaritan, Inc., under a joint operating agreement.

The Franciscan Sisters of Mary, who sponsor SSM Health Care, have a rich heritage that stems from the faith and compassion of their foundress, Mother Mary Odilia Berger, who migrated with four other Sisters from Germany to the United States because of religious persecution.

With only five dollars among them, the Sisters arrived in St. Louis on November 16, 1872, to live together in religious life and to serve people in need. The next day, the Sisters began nursing smallpox patients in their homes during an epidemic.

More than 100 years later, the leadership of SSM found strong parallels between the values of SSMHC and the principles of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). In 1990, the system took its initial steps toward deploying continuous quality improvement (CQI) systemwide, becoming one of the first health care systems in the nation to do so.

While some health care organizations, desiring immediate results, abandoned CQI during the 1990s, SSM Health Care decided to commit itself to a long-term journey. The system's leadership recognized that cultural change was required, which would take time.

In 1995, SSMHC began a systemwide process to apply for the Missouri Quality Award and the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award as a “fast track” to excellence within the organization. The entities applied for state quality awards, while the system prepared to make its application in 1999. This year was the first year that health care organizations were eligible to apply for MBNQA, and SSMHC was the only health care applicant to receive a MBNQA site visit.

Continuous quality improvement was embraced as a way for those working in the system to fulfill its mission which states: Our expression of the healing ministry of Christ demands that we be advocates and agents of change in promoting integration of body, mind and spirit within ourselves and in our relationship with others, God and our environment.

SSMHC also has developed the Core Values to guide behavior in achieving its mission. The statement of its values is that in accordance with the philosophy of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, which is to value the sacredness and dignity of each person. Therefore, SSM Health Care finds these five values consistent with both its heritage and ministerial priorities:

- Compassion
- Respect
- Excellence
- Stewardship
- Community

Leadership believes it maintains responsibility in modeling behavior and maintaining a standard of accountability. The desired behaviors are related to the mission and core values and are considered essential to success:

- Superior results in clinical, operational and financial performance
- Fact-based decision making
- Involvement and shared accountability
- Continuous quality improvement
- Customer focus
- Information sharing
- Developing people

This standardized set of performance expectations is used by executive leaders, managers and supervisors throughout the System. A process for development of individual leaders via a 360-degree feedback is available online and is a key part of the leadership approach.

As SSMHC continues its journey, to instill its timeless beliefs through modern-day CQI principles, the System believes it will be well positioned to meet patients' needs now and in the days to come.

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