

# Exploring healthcare excellence in the USA

**T**he first APO project addressing healthcare was the study mission to the USA on Application of Quality Management and Business Excellence in Healthcare, 28 July–1 August 2008, as part of the APO initiative to sustain quality award programs in member countries. The five-day mission was designed as a benchmarking/best practice exercise encompassing observational visits to world-class hospitals, especially winners of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award; workshops and dialogues with healthcare authorities; and attending a conference on emerging healthcare issues. The mission included 16 participants, mostly physicians and administrators from public and private hospitals.

The mission kicked off in Baltimore, MD, by visiting Johns Hopkins Hospital. Johns Hopkins' outstanding record of excellence is founded on patient-centered care through the merging of hospital management (lean Six Sigma operations) with customer relationship management, termed "customer experience management excellence." The hospital has recently been named "Best Hospital in the Country." While the fact-finding mission was still in Baltimore, the Boston-based Institute of Healthcare Improvement, known for its breakthrough series model of clinical leadership through collaborative learning and best practice dissemination, flew in a team for a half-day session.

At Mercy Health System, in Janesville, WI, a full day was spent with senior managers who candidly shared "how-to" advice and experiences of transforming a stand-alone hospital into a broader healing mission, Mercy House for the Homeless. Mercy's continued commitment to quality and patients is best explained in its new mission statement: "...to provide exceptional healthcare services resulting in healing in the broader sense." Fulfillment of this mission after only seven years resulted in Mercy receiving the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 2007.

Prentice Women's Hospital, established in 1997 as part of the expansion of Northwestern Memorial Hospital of Chicago, IL, has an impressive record of quality and service (voted preferred hospital by patients, especially work-

ing women, for 14 consecutive years) including a policy of equal care for all regardless of ability to pay and a public learning center considered the most comprehensive in the country. Funded by contributions and its operations alone, the hospital continuously provides superior service utilizing the lean Six Sigma model.

At the Office of the Governor of Illinois, a roundtable discussion on key challenges to the US healthcare system including reform of Medicare and Medicaid was held. A two-day Leadership Summit for Healthcare: Process Improvement and Business Excellence in Healthcare also held in Chicago, 31 July and 1 August, discussed recent innovations in quality management systems for healthcare practitioners including specific process improvement tools like lean production, Six Sigma, etc.

At the end of the mission, a short workshop session surveyed the current status of healthcare reform in the participants' countries. They concluded that there is insufficient standardization of the basic quality of operations except in Singapore, which has begun reforms recently. Since many member countries are still in the early stages of improving service quality, more education is needed, along with national customer satisfaction surveys. 🌀



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