

# Excellence, Innovation and Compassion

An Interview with Jennifer A. O'Neill DNP, APN, Senior Vice President, Chief Nursing Officer, Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS)

**EDITORS' NOTE** Jennifer O'Neill assumed her current position in March 2019 after having served in a number of roles at Saint Barnabas Medical Center including Chief Nursing Officer/VP Patient Care Services, AVP of Patient Care Services, Director of Nursing – Medical Surgical Services, and Nurse Manager, Pulmonary Medical Unit. Previously, she worked as a nurse practitioner at Anthony Quartell MD and Associates. O'Neill received a B.S.N, Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse from Boston College; an MSN, Nursing from Rutgers University – Newark; and a DNP, Nursing from University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.



Jennifer A. O'Neill

**INSTITUTION BRIEF** HSS ([hss.edu](http://hss.edu)) is the world's leading academic medical center focused on musculoskeletal health. At its core is Hospital for Special Surgery, nationally ranked #1 in orthopedics (for the tenth consecutive year) and #3 in rheumatology by U.S. News & World Report (2019-2020), and named a leader in pediatric orthopedics by U.S. News & World Report "Best Children's Hospitals" (2019-2020). HSS has a main campus in New York City and a growing network of related facilities. In addition to patient care, HSS leads the field in research, innovation and education. Through HSS Global Ventures and the HSS Education Institute, the institution is collaborating with medical centers and other organizations to advance the quality and value of musculoskeletal care and to make world-class HSS care more widely accessible nationally and internationally. HSS is the official hospital for a number of professional sports organizations and teams including the New York Giants, New York Mets, New York Knicks, Brooklyn Nets, UFC, US Rowing, US Biathlon, US Lacrosse, and USA Basketball. HSS is one of only three hospitals in the United States designated as a Medical Center of Excellence by FIFA.

## Will you provide an overview of your role and key areas of focus at HSS?

My role encompasses nearly every aspect of clinical care. In addition to nursing, I also oversee departments related to sterilization and management of operating rooms, pharmacy, infection control, case management and social work. I also work closely with nursing education and the team that's been involved with our Magnet

Recognition. My key areas of focus are mentoring and leadership development. When you have leaders who are visible and engaged and become aware of the needs of employees, it helps ensure that the employees have the tools and equipment that they need. It also helps drive employee engagement.

## How do you define the HSS culture and what have been the keys to HSS' strength and leadership in the industry?

At HSS, we have a culture of excellence, innovation and compassion.

When I first started working here and asked others to describe the culture, these three words were consistently used.

When I receive feedback from patients and families, it often highlights the compassion and the teamwork with which we deliver care, but for us to maintain our strength and standing throughout the country and globally, we put an equal emphasis on innovation and on employing outstanding, cutting-edge technology.

Safety is also a major priority. We've implemented a daily safety briefing with more than

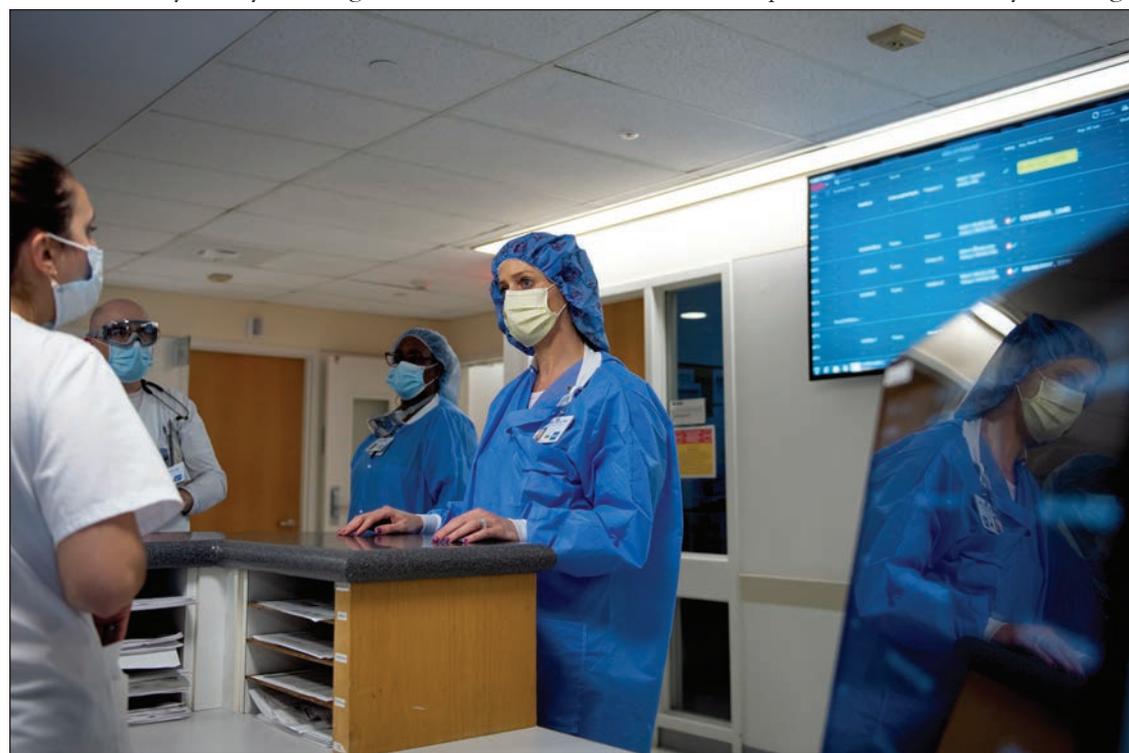
70 people present on the call in order to make sure the entire organization is aware of any safety issues. With COVID-19, ensuring safety is especially important for patients, visitors and staff.

## HSS is committed to providing the highest level of patient care and service standards. Will you discuss HSS' focus on patient care and emphasis on putting the patient first?

Ensuring the highest level of patient care is encompassed in our mission, vision and values. We always listen to our patients to make sure we are providing an exceptional experience, and then we look at evidence-based practices to see how we can further enhance that high-quality care. On a day-to-day basis, we're focused on making advances that are data-driven and outcomes-driven. We look for evidence of what we're doing well and for protocols we can put in place to drive continuous improvements.

## Will you discuss the role that nursing plays in advancing patient care and achieving better outcomes?

Nurses are an integral part of research. We partner with physicians and interdisciplinary teams on research projects and projects related to evidence-based practice. We constantly challenge



Jennifer O'Neill at work at Hospital for Special Surgery



*Hospital for Special Surgery on the East River of New York City*

ourselves to look at the data, and we give nursing staff the opportunity to lead protocols that will advance care and help achieve better outcomes.

**Will you highlight the impact of technology on nursing and how important is it to make sure that technology does not take away from the personal connection with patients?**

The human touch is very important in healing. Patients are more willing to ask questions if they have a good connection with their nurse. It's important to sit down with them and get to know them and their families on a personal level. We look for opportunities to do this, such as in developing individualized care plans. There needs to be a balance, because we do use a lot of technology. The staff has individual phones. We also utilize iPads in order to allow the team to round together. With COVID-19, we had to place most patients in isolation and reduce interactions, and installed safety cameras and increased the use of wireless and remote telemetry.

**How critical is it for HSS to build a diverse and inclusive workforce in order to mirror the diversity of the patients and communities it serves?**

When you have a diverse workforce caring for a diverse patient population, research shows it leads to better outcomes and better care. We continually are assessing our workforce. We recruit

**“Nurses are an integral part of research. We partner with physicians and interdisciplinary teams on research projects and projects related to evidence-based practice.”**

from diverse schools. We also look internally and provide new opportunities for our existing staff. We're currently working to provide onsite nursing programs for employees in other roles who may want to become nurses. We also provide other kinds of training and support for professional development.

**What advice do you offer to young people interested in building a career in nursing?**

When people want to meet with me about careers, my first question is always, “What's your passion?” because you have to love what you do. Nursing is such a diverse profession. I've gone from being a staff nurse to nurse practitioner to working in leadership positions. There's a lot of opportunity within the nursing profession to grow. I also stress the importance of being open-minded. I've been able to advance my career in part by being willing to take some risks. Challenging yourself creates discomfort, but it allows you to grow, both professionally and personally.

Having good interpersonal relationships is also important. I've been successful because I've been able to develop good relationships not only with my team, but with other individuals in the organization. I always take advantage of opportunities to learn from others, both inside and outside the field. It motivates me to try to do things differently, to take what others have done and implement it in my own practice. ●