

Where Inclusion is a Chief Priority

**An Interview with Jennifer H. Mieres, M.D.,
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, and
Medical Director, Center for Learning and Innovation**



Jennifer H. Mieres

EDITORS' NOTE Jennifer Mieres assumed her current post in July 2010. In addition, Mieres serves as a nuclear cardiologist on the faculty of the North Shore-LIJ Health System. Mieres, who has a strong track record as a patient and community advocate, was recruited from the New York University Langone Medical Center in Manhattan, where she served as Director of Nuclear Cardiology, a position she held previously at North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset, New York. Mieres is a co-author of the 2008 critically-acclaimed book, *Heart Smart for Black Women and Latinas: A 5-Week Program for Living a Heart-Healthy Lifestyle*. She is an active volunteer

with the American Heart Association (AHA), serves as a national spokesperson for the AHA's Go Red for Women movement, and is the Chair of the AHA's Professional Education Committee. Mieres is the immediate past President of the American Society of Nuclear Cardiology (ASNC) and was the organization's first female President. She continues to be an active board member of ASNC and serves on its Executive Council.

How critical is diversity and inclusion to the culture of the North Shore-LIJ Health System brand?

As President and CEO, Michael Dowling is committed to providing excellent patient care and fostering a health care environment that supports principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and effective communication to improve the health of the communities served by the North Shore-LIJ Health System. I share his passion for excellent health care for all people and I truly believe in empowering patients to be 50/50 partners in their health care management.

Over the past decade, North Shore-LIJ has grown from a small health system to one that is now 15 hospitals, serving a growing multicultural population of more than eight million. In June 2010, the health system received approval to open the Hofstra North Shore-LIJ School of Medicine and admit the inaugural class of future physicians in the summer of 2011. The addition of a medical school increases the prestige of the health system, placing us on the national map and in a new league. Therefore, in developing his strategic plan for the next decade, Michael Dowling recognized the need to expand the health system's existing diversity initiatives and formalized his commitment by establishing an Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Health Literacy. One example of the health system's diversity and inclusion initiatives is the ongoing Administrative Fellowship Program that was started six years ago with the mission of training a multicultural group of future health care leaders.

I am honored to have the opportunity to lead a team whose mission is the continued advancement of the health system's commitment to the delivery of culturally sensitive care to our diverse populations. As we embark on the journey to train physicians of the future, the recruitment and retention of a culturally diverse, culturally sensitive, and well-trained health care workforce is essential for our continued achievement of excellent patient care and outcomes. Diversity, inclusion, and effective communication through health literacy are three important tenets that are critical to providing high-quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate patient care. ●

Nurses Are the Heart and Soul of Health Care

**An Interview with Maureen White, R.N., M.B.A.,
Senior Vice President and Chief Nurse Executive**



Maureen White

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to assuming her current posts, Maureen White served as Vice President for Patient Care Services at North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset, NY, and LIJ Medical Center in New Hyde Park, New York. She held a series of prior positions at LIJ, including Vice President for Patient Care Services, Associate Director, Administrator for Patient Care Services - Finance and Systems, and Nursing Care Coordinator of the intensive care and open heart units. In 2000, White was recognized by the American Organization of Nurse Executives, receiving the prestigious Department Wide Innovations Award. She was the recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Award from Molloy College in 2004 and the 2008 Humanitarian Partner of the Year recipient from Queensborough Community College. White holds two undergraduate degrees from Molloy College and an M.B.A. from Fordham University.

In your role, how challenging is it to implement consistent protocol throughout the system and what key areas are you focused on?

We have over 42,000 employees, of which more than 10,000 are registered nurses. Everybody's voice needs to be heard. I base my leadership style on listening to as many people as we can to get as many opinions as possible. But at the end of the day, we need to make decisions and implement standards in the best interest of the patient.

I'm charged with standardizing best practices across our health system and ensuring that our hospitals and nurses are meeting the quality metrics. Offering educational programs to prepare our nurses to deliver the highest-quality care is always a challenge because health care changes so rapidly.

So my job is about gaining consensus, instituting best practices, and communicating those best practices to all the stakeholders. My biggest challenge is communicating the changes that need to be made, the changes that have been made, and the reasons we believe they are the right changes.

Many are concerned about the shortage of nurses and other health care professionals. Is top talent still excited to enter the industry?

Times of economic stress and uncertainty have actually benefitted the health care industry. After 9/11, many people on Wall Street wanted to contribute more and went back to school to become nurses or EMTs. During times of social change, people think of health care differently.

Nurses generally start thinking about retirement from 50 to 55. But with the economic downturn, many nurses have postponed retirement because they're not sure what the future holds and if they will be financially stable if they retire. Across the country, we see nursing vacancy and turnover rates declining.

But the shortage is still there and it's going to get worse in the coming years as the economy improves. By 2020, it's predicted that there will be more than 500,000 open nursing positions due to retirement and natural progression. The demand for health care is going to increase while the supply of health care workers decreases.

We've created an environment in which nurses are valued and respected, and in which nursing leaders emerge. It's up to the organization to bring out the leadership within all of our employees. We've done that by giving people opportunities to build their confidence. We've created a learning environment and set the expectations around what people go into health care for – being there for the patient – and we tap into their inner core of motivation. ●