

A Commitment to Excellence

An Interview with Margaret Pastuszko,
Chief Strategy Officer, Mount Sinai Health System

EDITORS' NOTE Margaret Pastuszko is also Executive Vice President of Strategic and Business Planning. She began her career at Mount Sinai in 2001 as Associate Dean of Operations for the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. She later transitioned to the role of Vice President for Business Planning at The Mount Sinai Medical Center. Pastuszko received her Bachelor of Economics with a concentration in multinational management and international finance from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. As a Divisional Administrator and Practice Manager of Internal Medicine at Temple University Hospital, Pastuszko was on the frontlines of providing excellence in care. After obtaining an M.B.A. from The Wharton School with a major in health care management and economics, Pastuszko became a consultant with APM Management Consultants and later, CSC Healthcare Consulting, with a focus in strategic planning, before joining Mount Sinai.



Margaret Pastuszko

INSTITUTION BRIEF The Mount Sinai Health System (www.mountsinaihealth.org) combines the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and seven hospital campuses to provide the highest quality health care throughout the New York metropolitan area. Their integrated resources and expertise offer patients comprehensive care from birth through geriatrics, including complex cases. This newly established system significantly expands their geographic footprint and increases their number of beds to 3,571.

What is the secret to the success of the Mount Sinai Health System?

The secret is the commitment to excellence. Mount Sinai is at the divide between the richest and poorest neighborhoods within New York City.

We decided a long time ago to focus on providing excellent care, regardless of who the customer is.

We fundamentally work as a team that is focused on the future vision and goals of the institution.

How do you ensure that you don't lose the doctor/patient relationship?

There is a concern that the implementation of the new technological advances, such as electronic medical records, may get between the traditional interaction of the nurses and physicians with the patient.

Over the past year, we have made a strong effort to focus on the fundamentals of health care, especially

the human component of nurse and physician communication with patients.

I'm spending a lot of time trying to eliminate non-value-added items from our providers' jobs so they can focus on the patient, and don't have to focus on filling out forms and dealing with technology that gets in the way.

How do you find the balance with the technology?

Long-term, it's a good thing. It's going to allow us to capture outcomes of care over many episodic visits of the patient and improve the overall outcomes.

The implementation of new technology does get in the way of being able to deliver seamless care. Mount Sinai has gone through the implementation of the electronic medical record system in its hospitals. We have learned a lot through that process, in terms of how to retain patient communication and feedback while trying to deal with yet another piece of equipment and distraction during that communication.

However, long term, it is a critical component and will fundamentally change the way we are able to deliver and enhance patient care.

How far out do you look to plan the strategy for the future?

The long-term vision is critical because the noise in the short-term can be distracting. We don't want to make decisions based on just six months to a year down the road. We focus on a three- to five-year vision, because then the noise from the business aspect is eliminated.

We can make corrections along the way as long as we're focused on the ultimate goal of where the organization needs to be in three to five years.

How critical is it to mirror the diversity of your clientele within your own workforce?

It's critical to make the customers comfortable within this environment, and to the extent that our workforce can help accomplish that, it's significant.

Our focus is on excellence, which allows us to identify the best individuals for the designated jobs. This provides a care model that is not only comfortable but also, from a quality and patient experience perspective, achieves the level of excellence we aspire to.

How important is it to engage all levels within the organization?

Mount Sinai has an open-door policy from the CEO on down. This creates an inclusive workforce that is vested in the success of the institution as a whole.

We focus on engagement and incentive alignment, and on rewarding performance in an objective manner. This allows us to build an inclusive workforce.

How do you put metrics in place to make sure you're achieving the highest service standards?

The service standards include some which are imposed on us by the industry and are measured in a public way; others we identify ourselves as key components of the service standards.

We have a clear methodology which lays out standards and indicators across the system relating to quality, safety, service excellence, and customer friendliness. We make those indicators transparent across the entire organization and work towards their improvement.

We have also invested in getting feedback from our customers in a timely fashion so we can respond quickly.

Are there opportunities for women to lead in your industry?

The industry is evolving in this respect. Academic medicine is a traditional structure, but it has been changing over time. As health care is moving into uncharted territory beyond only providing the typical health care to focusing on managing cost, the traditional skill sets are not enough to be successful. Novel business approaches are required, and those come gender blind.

Through transparency and the matrix of a results-oriented organization, we are focused on outcomes and results that are independent of who is behind those outcomes and results.

I believe there are places for best-suited individuals in the industry, regardless of gender and I have seen women at Mount Sinai rise to leadership positions because they are the best candidates for those positions.

What is it about Mount Sinai that makes it a place where you have wanted to stay?

I come from a consulting background where the life span of a project is much shorter. I didn't believe I would stay in one organization for an extended period of time.

What has made me remain here has been the commitment of the leadership team towards Mount Sinai's success, which is bigger than any one individual.

We are all working towards creating an institution and leaving a legacy of excellence behind us where it's not one individual that is highlighted – it's a team effort. ●