

Striving to be the Most Trusted Educator

An Interview with Laura Robbins, D.S.W., C.S.W., M.S.W., Senior Vice President, Education & Academic Affairs, Hospital for Special Surgery



Laura Robbins

EDITORS' NOTE Dr. Laura Robbins received her doctorate degree in social welfare in 1994 following over a decade in practice as a rheumatology clinical social worker. She started her career in 1975 in the rheumatology division at Downstate Medical Center in New York City. During her doctoral studies, she was recruited to be part of a National Institutes of Health-funded multipurpose arthritis center at Hospital for Special Surgery, where she furthered her clinical and research experience. Robbins served as Chair of the Arthritis Foundation from 2004 to 2006. In 2009, she also received the Charles B. Harding Award from the Arthritis Foundation.

Will you provide an overview of Education & Academic Affairs within HSS?

The department spans a wide continuum of education both nationally and globally. This includes public and patient education, and graduate medical education, including medical students, residents, fellows, and residents or fellows who come from other institutions into HSS, as well as continuing education.

One vision is “striving to be the most trusted educator,” which is about providing education content to a variety of audiences. It’s part of the three-pronged mission of the hospital, which is clinical care, research, and education. Much of our focus is on education, which often interacts with the clinical side, and even with research.

All of the three parts of the mission are about better quality and outstanding patient care. We believe better-educated doctors result in better patient care.

What is your primary focus in each of these areas?

Within public and patient education, we’re following the CDC’s public health agenda as it relates to musculoskeletal medicine. We do many population health-type programs where we are out in the community raising awareness about issues like osteoporosis and rheumatoid arthritis, before people even need to think about them. Once they’re patients, we have programs tailored to them as patients, many of which are service-based, but others are research-based. We have very select programs where we study outcomes, and an extensive pediatric program as well.

In the Professional Education departments, we have about 400 medical students who come here as part of their required training at different levels of medical school. We have one of the most sought-after orthopedic residency programs in the country.

We also have 17 fellowships, which are subspecialty programs. Within that, we have other types of trainees who come here for the different specialties for anywhere from a few days to a few months to get clinical experience.

In addition, we’re a CME-accredited provider with commendation, so we offer an array of continuing education programs to various audiences, nationally and globally.

With our eAcademy, our digital education platform, we have over 8,000 professional members who access our content. We have around 300 different types of modules online and we’re in 113 countries.

We have a peer-reviewed HSS Journal that features research that supports advances in the field. The Journal is published three times a year and reaches over 57,000 health professionals.

What is it about the culture at HSS that keeps people here?

People work hard, they are dedicated, and they are so proud to be at HSS. If someone is a good fit, when they come here, they become fully engaged because they want to be affiliated with the best hospital for bone and joint conditions. ●

A Caring Culture

An Interview with Lisa A. Goldstein, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Hospital for Special Surgery



Lisa A. Goldstein

EDITORS' NOTE Lisa Goldstein joined Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS) in March 1997. Before this, she served as Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Wayne General Hospital in Wayne, New Jersey, from 1986 to 1996. Goldstein is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives. She received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Industrial and Labor Relations from Cornell University in 1977 and her Master of Professional Studies Degree in Health Services Administration from the Business School at Cornell University in 1979.

What is the secret to HSS’s incredible success?

The root of our success is a uniquely focused, inspiring, and enduring mission – combining patient care and outcomes, and the advancement of our field. A byproduct of that is a distinctive culture that is exceptionally compelling to both the talent we need and patients who need and expect the very best. It’s as much about energy and resolve as it is about quality – for my colleagues, and the patients and families we serve.

Are you looking to open more facilities in international markets?

We’re working to advance musculoskeletal care worldwide, but for now through education and collaborations as opposed to opening our own facilities.

Many years ago, we took baby steps by entering into a best-practice transfer in the United Kingdom. We made the decision at that time not to invest in brick-and-mortar but to share our expertise in areas such as how we educate our fellows, residents, and physicians; our rehabilitation practices; nursing; and infection control practices.

We have found that cultures elsewhere are very different, so when we embark on an international project, we have to learn what their needs are and then evaluate the opportunity for sharing our best practice there. Often, we learn new things that we can put in place at HSS.

We’re currently most involved with healthcare organizations in Brazil and Korea, but we’re contributing to the advancement of our field elsewhere, such as by providing CME to professionals in more than 100 countries.

How critical is it to track employee engagement?

It’s only important if the leadership of the organization is committed to employee engagement as a strategy, which we are. That’s because meaningful measurement is more than validation – it’s a dashboard for continuous improvement and optimization.

Because HSS is so specialized, we’re very good at what we do. Our culture is such that we are never satisfied. When you are the best at something, it’s healthy to look inward to find motivation for how to exceed the high water mark you set in the previous measurement.

Engagement doesn’t just involve management; it also has to do with the interactions and dynamics that go on within the work unit. As senior managers, we routinely engage our staff in discussions about how we can help them be more successful. This process helps us create a better workplace. In 2012 and 2013, HSS received the “Gallup Great Workplace Award” – the only hospital in the Northeast to achieve that recognition.

Has the doctor/patient relationship changed to the point where there is less time for patients?

We are an important player, but also small and independent. Efficiency is important and time with patients is a key to that efficiency. One of the most common pieces of feedback we receive from patients is that they are surprised to receive a high level of personal attention from their HSS physician, but we do that because the better we know the patient – and their motivation – the more successful and efficient we are. It’s a value we are safeguarding even with the current EMR implementation exploring how technology can help us to provide the most efficient and most personal care. ●