

## Cooperation, Compassion and Innovation

An Interview with Kristen Morris,  
Chief Government and Community Relations Officer, Cleveland Clinic

**EDITORS' NOTE** Kristen Morris joined Cleveland Clinic in 2013 as the Chief Government and Community Relations Officer. Her areas of responsibility include cultivating and maintaining relationships at the federal, state and local government levels to monitor development and influence legislative outcomes that affect the mission of the Cleveland Clinic; fostering continual development and partnership with the government agencies to conduct critical



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research and share best practices; ensuring good relations, communications and involvement with the city of Cleveland and its civic organizations; developing and leading community relations strategies and initiatives that support public health goals in the neighborhood; and creating and engaging civic education programs to promote education in the sciences and health disciplines. Morris' background includes ten years representing the biotech and medical device industries, eight years as the Vice President of Legislative Affairs for the American Hospital Association and several years representing physician associations including time at the American Medical Association. She also served as a legislative assistant on Capitol Hill. Morris graduated from Purdue University.

**INSTITUTION BRIEF** Based in Cleveland, Ohio, Cleveland Clinic ([my.clevelandclinic.org](http://my.clevelandclinic.org)) is a nonprofit multispecialty academic medical center that integrates clinical and hospital care with research and education. It was founded in 1921 by four renowned physicians with a vision of providing outstanding patient care based upon the principles of cooperation, compassion, and innovation. Cleveland Clinic has pioneered many medical breakthroughs, including coronary artery bypass surgery and the first face transplant in the United States. U.S. News & World Report consistently names Cleveland Clinic as one of the nation's best hospitals in its annual "America's Best Hospitals" survey. More than 3,500 full-time salaried physicians and researchers and 11,000 nurses represent 120 medical specialties and subspecialties. The Cleveland Clinic Health System includes a main campus near downtown Cleveland

and more than 75 Northern Ohio outpatient locations, including 19 full-service Family Health Centers, Cleveland Clinic Florida, the Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health in Las Vegas, Cleveland Clinic Canada and Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi.

**What makes Cleveland Clinic special and how do you define the Cleveland Clinic difference?**

It is our focus on everyone wanting to be the best at every level.

We want to be the best place for care anywhere, we want to be the best place to work, and we put a tremendous amount of energy and effort into accomplishing that.

**How critical is the commitment to continuous improvement to the culture of Cleveland Clinic, starting with the top of the organization?**

A new element was introduced when Dr. Tom Mihajevic came on board as our CEO where, every single day, we sit down and have tiered huddles to review everything that is going on in the organization to help determine what we can do better.

The process is data driven, but we also share the experiences and anecdotes that strike our caregivers and roll all of that information up to our CEO. We even celebrate the good catches – things that could have been bad if we hadn't prevented them.

We're working in an organization that has nothing but A-level people and it is in their nature to constantly strive to be better – I have never seen anything like it.

**Will you discuss the focus that Cleveland Clinic has around purpose and community?**

There are our four care priorities, which we embraced as part of our five-year strategic plan.

Patients are always first, then caregivers – we treat our patients and each other as family, and then our operations – we treat our facility as if it were our home. The fourth pillar is community.

From a practical perspective, every hospital serves and often employs those who are right around them, and so we are naturally part of the community.

Health systems are continually learning how to care for people outside of their four

walls in a far more meaningful and long-term way.

**Is it important that your community efforts align with the business or do you view corporate responsibility programs separately?**

It's all one and the same. A really strong corporate social responsibility strategy starts with the nature of the corporation. The social is what the community needs, and the responsibility is the balance between the two – we do what we are good at and align our strengths with what a community needs.

When organizations become unfocused, we water down our impact.

**What role is Cleveland Clinic playing in leading the transformation taking place in healthcare?**

Our generation has a responsibility and obligation to solve the global economic crisis around healthcare. The clinic has a firm footing in understanding that wellness, and how one cares for themselves throughout their lives, is a direct correlation to how costly their healthcare will be and to the quality of life that person will have later in life.

This is not necessarily new thinking, but driving action behind that message and doing everything we can to enhance policies and practices that foster that wellness are what our generation has to do. We have to change the culture around healthcare.

As an example, it was a big news day almost 12 years ago when the Cleveland Clinic announced it wasn't going to hire smokers anymore. This has easily been our single most impactful policy on the wellbeing of our workforce. What if other large corporations were to adopt and embrace the same principles? We could see a time where we could significantly improve the number one driver for cardiovascular diseases if this was something we would adopt as a culture.

Our signature program is youth education for a reason. That is where the most impactful health practices start and that is also where we can inspire the next generation of the workforce, which aligns with our business imperative.

As a global, academic health system, it's in the Cleveland Clinic's DNA to learn, implement, and always share best practices. ●