

Leadership By All

An Interview with Louis A. Shapiro, President and Chief Executive Officer, HSS

EDITORS' NOTE Lou Shapiro assumed his current position in October 2006. Previously, he served as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Geisinger Health System's Clinical Enterprise. He began his career at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh and then joined McKinsey & Company as a leader within their health-care practice. Shapiro is a fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives, former Chair of the Greater New York Hospital Association Board of Governors (2014-2015), and on the board of Crutches 4 Kids and Latitude Food Allergy Care.



Louis A. Shapiro

INSTITUTION BRIEF HSS (hss.edu) is the world's leading academic medical center focused on musculoskeletal health. At its core is Hospital for Special Surgery, nationally ranked No. 1 in orthopedics (for the tenth consecutive year) and No. 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 2018, HSS provided care to 139,000 patients and performed more than 32,000 surgical procedures, and people from all 50 U.S. states and 80 countries traveled to receive care at HSS. 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.

HSS is a purpose-driven institution with a long history of supporting its employees, patients and communities. How has HSS adapted its business and the way it works during this unprecedented time in order to continue to effectively support its employees, patients and communities?

At HSS, we are singularly focused on the treatment of musculoskeletal conditions. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit New York City hard, we did not let this stop us from helping our community in need. We proactively suspended all but the most essential orthopedic surgery, which allowed us to free up capacity, supplies and staff to provide critical care and medical surgery to overflow patients from other New York City hospitals. This was done before any city, state or federal mandate. We rapidly transformed our operating rooms and post-anesthesia care units into intensive care units. We deployed tens of thousands of units of surplus personal protective equipment (PPE) to other hospitals in need.

“At HSS, we believe in a “Leadership By All” philosophy that allows us to operate with unmatched dedication while supporting every member of our organization.”

Recognizing the enormity of the crisis and its impact on the HSS community, as well as the unique burden the current situation places on our frontline clinicians, we quickly mobilized to devise new ways to assist HSS staff and their

families. A firm commitment to frequent and transparent communication across the organization was essential. We established a Clinician Peer Support program to address the stress related to COVID-19, formed a Wellness and Resiliency Council and appointed a 23-year U.S. Special Forces veteran trauma nurse to the new position of Chief Wellness and Resiliency Officer. We also supported employees with bus and other transportation services, childcare, temporary housing, elder care support, discounted tutoring/test preparation and self-care resources. Daily e-mail and video updates were deployed, weekly livestreams were held and a custom web app was established, making real-time information and support available to all staff 24/7. Wellness offerings have expanded to include employee counseling by phone or video chat and phone and web-based applications promoting meditation and anxiety-management exercises.

HSS was built with an entrepreneurial spirit and an ability to be nimble and adapt. How is HSS addressing its business during this time in order to succeed in this challenging environment?

As a leading healthcare organization, HSS remains steadfast in our commitment to uphold our mission of delivering the highest caliber of care, conducting leading-edge research and educating the next generation of musculoskeletal leaders. The investments we have made in our care management enterprise during the COVID-19 pandemic will allow us to continue to do what we do – and do it even better. Our research enterprise will continue to redefine and shape the field of musculoskeletal health. We will continue to nimbly execute on our critical role in this crisis, and will return better and stronger, pioneering research and discoveries and getting people back to what they need and love to do better than anywhere else.

How has HSS' workforce changed the way they work in order to be effective with the changes that have been necessary for all organizations to make and how proud are you to see the resilience of your team?

I have always been proud of the way we operate at HSS, but during this pandemic my pride has risen to a new level. Truly exceptional demonstrations of teamwork have been constantly on display during this time of crisis. At HSS, we live by the philosophy of “Leadership By All,” where everyone is a leader regardless of your role. Because of this, everyone at HSS upholds the same level of dedication and commitment to our organization, the



HSS on East 70th Street

patients we serve and our community. This is evident not only in our clinical staff, but all of our support staff who make what we do possible, whether they are physically at an HSS location or continuing to provide that support remotely. I have never been prouder to lead this organization than I have been during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is a great deal of discussion about businesses reopening in a “new normal.” What is your outlook for what this new normal may look like and how is HSS approaching the next stage in this crisis?

COVID-19 is a defining moment in HSS’ history. While change has become a “new normal,” we continue to plan for the future. We continue to learn, and the insights we gain from these learnings are what make us a stronger organization. COVID-19 has bolstered what was already an extremely impressive foundation of teamwork, decision-making and leadership today and for our future.

HSS is headquartered in New York City. What are the keys to New York City’s recovery?

With the outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, New York City has undergone a seismic shift in daily life. But this city is resilient, and it is crucial we continue to follow policies and protocols in place to ensure a healthier future and a safe reopening.

HSS is committed to building a diverse and inclusive workforce. Will you discuss these efforts and how critical is it to have diverse perspectives and experiences at the table when making business decisions?

HSS strives to deliver optimal care and services to all our patients by adopting initiatives, behaviors, attitudes and policies that enhance cultural competency and inclusion while serving a multicultural population, regardless of race, color, creed, sexual orientation, ethnic origin or any other background or identity. To do this, we ourselves must foster a culture of diversity. It is essential that within any organization, diverse perspectives and voices are included and heard. Our culture of tolerance, understanding and respect allows us to gain a broader perspective on challenges and evaluate solutions from an array of angles. At HSS, we have a Diversity and Inclusion Council that is working to develop and offer multiple opportunities for individuals across HSS to share their voices. With this input, the Council is helping to shape strategies that ensure HSS exemplifies the values of diversity and inclusion. A first step was to elevate diversity and inclusion as an explicit value and accountable commitment of the organization.

What do you see as the role that business can play as a force for good in society by bringing its talent, expertise and resources to help address global crises?

At HSS, we believe in a “Leadership By All” philosophy that allows us to operate with unmatched dedication while supporting every member of our organization. It is crucial that organizations educate and support their staff while also cultivating a culture that allows them to feel proud. When this is fundamentally solid, organizations have an opportunity to excel. You become a trusted source on the outside when you build trust from within.

You are known to be an optimistic person. During this difficult and uncertain time, what are you telling your people and what would you say to young people across the country who are deeply concerned and uncertain about the future?

The trauma of the pandemic and events taking place in our world today will likely outlast the virus itself. During a tumultuous time, take time for yourself to cope with what is going on around you. Remember that difficult times never last, but resilient people do. Throughout life, we are constantly climbing a mountain, and there will be moments that push us to the bottom of the mountain and require us to stand up and climb back up. That’s the important part – that we always keep climbing. It makes us stronger, no matter how hard the challenges are ahead. ●