

A Culture of Care

An Interview with Annabella Salvador-Kelly, MD, Senior Vice President, Medical Affairs and Associate Chief Medical Officer, Northwell Health

EDITORS' NOTE *In addition to her current role, Annabella Salvador-Kelly has served Northwell Health as Associate Medical Director, Long Island Jewish Medical Center; Associate Chair of Long Island Jewish's Department of Emergency Medicine; and Director of Performance Improvement. Salvador-Kelly earned a B.S. degree in biology from New York University and an MD from SUNY Downstate Medical Center.*



Annabella Salvador-Kelly

How critical is culture to the strength and industry leadership of Northwell Health?

Northwell has a special culture. Our culture is dedicated to providing world-class service and patient-centered care which is our number one priority. The organization strives to promote that culture and a commitment to excellence, compassion and the communities we serve. We focus on something that we call a culture of care and care is an acronym which stands for connectedness, awareness, respect and empathy. Our chief executive, Michael Dowling, always says that our goal is simple – be better tomorrow than we are today and our people are at the center of it all. Michael is clear that people are our greatest asset and that every patient that chooses Northwell deserves an exceptional patient experience and the highest quality of care. Defining our culture starts at the top and trickles down throughout the organization to our front-line staff and to all of our team members.

Will you highlight your role and key areas of focus?

I am responsible for leading medical affairs throughout Northwell Health which includes credentialing and privileging of providers, standardization of policies and procedures, as well as standardization of hospital regulations and bylaws, and recruiting and mentoring talented physicians and team members. I am often involved when we conduct searches for leaders to the organization which is a passion of mine. When you are a part of Northwell Health, you have the opportunity to take on additional responsibility and I currently co-chair the COVID-19 clinical advisory group and am also involved with the Zucker School of Medicine.

Northwell Health has treated more COVID-19 patients than any other health system. How proud are you to see the way the Northwell team displayed such resilience and strength during this challenging and difficult time?

Northwell was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and managed to use the benefits of being a large system to face many challenges. I am so proud of Northwell and all of our heroes who responded to the pandemic. During the pandemic, we came together as one large system to take care of our patients and provide the best care possible. Our team members were the key to making our success happen. They never gave up and they continue to respond to the pandemic at Northwell and beyond. Many of our team members responded to the

needs of other healthcare systems by volunteering their time to assist them by going to work clinically at other sites and also by providing their clinical expertise and knowledge to educate on the lessons that we learned here at Northwell. The work is clearly not over and our team members continue to focus on our recovery plans, our resurgence plan, and our vaccination implementation plan. It starts at the top and Michael Dowling was there every day with us, visiting each of the hospitals, which was instrumental.

Northwell Health has placed a major focus on addressing and supporting the mental and emotional strain that its team members have endured during this crisis. Will you discuss this focus in order to meet the needs of Northwell's people?

It was huge for us to make sure that all of our heroes felt safe and knew that they were taken care of. We were one of the first organizations to mandate masking and then to mandate N95 masks because we wanted to show our team members that their safety was paramount to us. We also developed wellness programs for our people as well as a crisis hotline that anybody could call at any time of the day in case they needed help. Unfortunately, I had a colleague that committed suicide during this pandemic. She was an emergency medicine physician as I was previously, and there is always this fear of people speaking up and asking for help and we wanted to do everything we could to make sure our team members knew that we were there for them. We are still looking continuously at mental health issues to make sure that team members have the help they need and that we are supporting them in every way possible.

How critical is it for Northwell Health's workforce to be diverse and inclusive in order to mirror the diversity of the patients and communities it serves?

Northwell has been on a journey over the past ten years to most effectively address the issues of diversity, inclusion and health equity. Northwell is committed to creating opportunities for diverse candidates and to developing a pipeline for the future and to supporting growth and development for all of our team members. One of our goals is to attract and retain diverse faculty for our medical school since we know how critical this is for the continued success of the school. We are proud that Northwell Health was recognized as one of Fortune 100 Best Places for Diversity which shows the dedication and commitment of Northwell to all of its employees.

You mentioned the Zucker School of Medicine. How critical is it for Northwell to have a medical school and will you highlight the impact of the school?

The Zucker School of Medicine has made an important impact for Northwell. Our faculty has the opportunity to coach, educate and guide the next generation of physicians which is a great privilege and to do it in the way that the school currently delivers that education is so valuable. When I went to medical school, the first two years were spent sitting in an auditorium listening to lectures. The Zucker School of Medicine gets its students involved in the clinical realm right away which is the reason many of us went into medicine since we wanted to be involved with patients. Our students immediately work with the paramedics and EMTs to get certified and the classes are group based with participation which is a different way of teaching and this is one of the benefits of the school. Our school serves as a pipeline for future residents and attending physicians which provides great value for Northwell.

You have spent more than 20 years at Northwell Health. What has made the experience so special for you?

The minute I stepped foot in 1999 to work in the emergency room at North Shore University Hospital, I fell in love with the program. I knew early on that this was the right place for me and it comes down to the culture and the people. The people are like family to me. It is also exciting to be part of an organization that continues to grow as we have done through hospital mergers and this has allowed our team members growth opportunities as well. One other reason why I feel that Northwell is special is our fearless leader, Michael Dowling. He is a special person who leads by example and truly cares about his team members, and this was on full display during the COVID-19 pandemic. ●