

Partnering with the Community

An Interview with Lorraine Chambers Lewis, Executive Director, Long Island Jewish Forest Hills

EDITORS' NOTE As Executive Director, Lorraine Chambers Lewis oversees the day-to-day operations and strategic plans for Long Island Jewish Forest Hills hospital, a 312-bed community teaching hospital that provides inpatient medical and surgical care, intensive care and women's health services. She previously served as Vice President of Employee Health Services overseeing the administrative occupational health needs of Northwell Health's workforce.



Lorraine Chambers Lewis

Under her leadership, that workforce was ferried through health crises like Ebola, H1N1, and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic. A physician assistant since 1993, Chambers Lewis has worked in emergency medicine, critical care, internal medicine and occupational health. She began her career at Queens Hospital Center and came to Northwell, then North Shore-LIJ Health System, in 2002 as a supervising physician assistant for Long Island Jewish Medical Center's emergency department. After transitioning to occupational health in 2007, she took on positions of increasing responsibility as the function grew during a time of rapid expansion for Northwell. In addition to launching Northwell's first injury management and prevention program for worker safety, she launched an occupational health business model for direct to employer clients including an on-site health and wellness clinic. Chambers Lewis is a graduate of The CUNY School of Medicine Physician Assistant Program and received her MBA in Quality Management from Hofstra University. She is also a fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

Will you highlight your new role as executive director of Northwell Health's Long Island Jewish Forest Hills hospital and what excited you about the opportunity?

I was very excited about this new role as I have been working in various positions in healthcare since 1993, as a physician assistant, healthcare administrator and other functions. The opportunity to oversee a hospital and to set the strategic vision and plan around providing access to and serving the community in Queens is a wonderful opportunity and I feel fortunate to be in the role. Forest Hills hospital is located in a very dense area in the

heart of Queens and the impact that we are able to make in providing access to the community and doing this type of work is exciting.

Will you discuss Forest Hills hospital's focus on prevention and wellness and to working with the community to address health needs before illness?

I believe that a hospital has a responsibility to the community it serves to keep that community healthy. The way to do this is to focus on preventing illness and taking a

holistic approach to a person's health; it cannot just be about coming to the hospital when you are ill. This happens when you focus on preventive health and when you are out in the community being seen and building relationships, and this is a big focus for us at Forest Hills hospital. I think this is especially important in a community like Queens which has such a diverse population and different pockets within the community. The entire community needs to know that Forest Hills hospital is a partner and provides high-quality healthcare with a diverse, talented workforce.

This was apparent during COVID as Queens was the epicenter of the epicenter in our country and Forest Hills hospital was there to serve the community in this time of need. Our team stepped up and showed resilience during this crisis and we are focused on continuing to show our level of care and service excellence as we address the future needs of our community.

You mentioned the diversity of the population in Queens. How critical is it for Forest Hills hospital's workforce to mirror the diversity of the community it serves?

It is vital that our workforce reflects the community that we are serving. Our team members are from all over the world, and part of our culture is to celebrate our differences and to build an inclusive environment. Many of our team members have been with Forest Hills hospital for decades and we have a tight, family culture. This comes through to our patients who come to Forest Hills hospital and see that our workforce is from the community and speaks their language and understands their needs. This builds trust with the community and makes us a better organization in our mission to deliver high-quality care.

How proud are you to see the strength and resilience of your team members in addressing the pandemic and how important has it been for Forest Hills hospital to be there to support the emotional and mental health concerns of your team?

Our team members were the ones delivering care early in the pandemic during a time when there was so much uncertainty. I have such pride and respect for all of them. Prioritizing their well-being and supporting their behavioral health needs is crucial for them and their families to move forward. We cannot put our heads in the sand. Successful organizations address these concerns directly by providing various ways and environments in which team members can get support. Northwell meets people where they are and ensures a culture that makes it comfortable to reach out for support. Resilience is not an endless commodity. We have to provide the tools to truly aid our team members.

Will you discuss the value and importance for Forest Hills hospital being a part of Northwell Health and having the support and backing of such a large, industry-leading health system?

Being a part of Northwell Health is a major component of what we want our community to better understand. When you walk into the doors of Long Island Jewish Forest Hills hospital, you are walking into Northwell Health with all of the resources and support and advanced care that the entire health system is able to offer. A patient has access to all of the immediate services at Forest Hills hospital, but also has access to all of the advanced medical services that are provided throughout Northwell Health. This was a huge component of the level of care that we were able to provide in dealing with COVID in our community. We were able to move patients around based on need and were able to continue to take new patients because we are a part of a large health system like Northwell Health.

What has made working in healthcare so special for you?

I went into healthcare because it was always fascinating to me, whether it be how our bodies work, how we heal, or how we stay healthy. I was attracted to the idea of serving people in need and taking care of others. I am fortunate to be able to do this as part of Northwell Health which is committed to excellence and putting the patient first. ●