

Raising the Bar

An Interview with Jennifer Rentas, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff, HSS

EDITORS' NOTE As Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff at HSS, Jennifer Rentas works with the President and CEO and the Board of Trustees to move forward strategic priorities for the organization. Before serving as Chief of Staff, she was responsible for regional markets at HSS. In this role, she led the execution of the Hospital's collaboration with Stamford Hospital. In Summer 2020, Rentas served as Assistant Secretary, Health for the Office of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo in New York State



Jennifer Rentas

prior to returning to HSS in January 2021. Before joining HSS in 2012, she was Special Assistant to the Executive Vice President at the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and a Senior Policy Analyst for the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured in Washington, D.C. She also served as Manager of Special Projects in the Office of the Executive Vice President and COO, and in the Office of the CNO, at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital in New York City after having started her career at Saint Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston, New Jersey, as an analyst to the executive team. Rentas holds a BA degree in social studies from Harvard College, a Master in Public Policy degree from the Harvard Kennedy School and an MBA from the Harvard Business School.

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. HSS has a main campus in New York City and a growing network of related facilities. In addition to patient care, HSS leads the field in research, innovation and education. HSS is the official hospital for a number of professional sports organizations and teams.

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

As SVP and Chief of Staff at HSS, I have what I like to call a few different "buckets" of responsibility. In practice, these often are secondary to what may be the priority of the day. As a big fan of The West Wing, I like to try to use Leo McGarry as something of a role model when trying to juggle so many different priorities. One of my areas of focus is ensuring that the messaging and information shared around the organization by Louis A. Shapiro, President and CEO at HSS, and the executive team

are coordinated. This requires me to be involved in the strategic planning of the institution on many levels.

Another bucket of responsibility involves working with our Board of Trustees which means ensuring we are keeping them engaged with HSS in ways that make the most of their experience and provide them with meaningful opportunities. I am also involved with the government affairs efforts at HSS, which often means trying to stay ahead of any new legislation or regulations at the city, state and federal level that might

affect our institution and advocating to make sure that our interests are being considered.

The nice thing about my role is that it's always evolving. Lately, I have had the opportunity to expand my scope to some of the operational aspects of the institution including our social work and access teams, the research institute and the facilities and construction teams.

You have held a number of executive positions at HSS prior to your current role. How valuable has it been to have such broad and vast experience at HSS as you assumed the role?

Having been at HSS for nearly a decade now, I am grateful to have been able to work with so many different areas of the organization. Starting my time here in service lines gave me a chance to see first-hand how things work across the patient care spectrum at HSS. That exposure was immensely helpful, for example, when I was working on efforts to replicate care in other places, such as our various regional sites, including our partnership with Stamford Health. To live up to the HSS name, we must make sure that patients receive the same quality of care that they would receive at HSS in New York City and that requires commitment from everyone to the values and mission. You get to learn an organization well when you have to replicate its quality somewhere else and living up to its reputation.

Spending time working through those challenges has given me a unique perspective and enabled me to better help Lou to assess the implications of a particular decision: Where are the different connecting points, what are the unintended consequences, with whom do we need to communicate about this first?

How did HSS adapt its business to address the challenges caused by the pandemic and how proud are you to see the resilience of HSS' workforce during this unprecedented time?

Before we were mandated to stop elective surgery, we made the decision to turn HSS from a specialty orthopedics center to a general care hospital. We turned our operating rooms into intensive care units almost overnight. That we were able to do so seamlessly is a testament to the unparalleled professionalism and ability of our staff, everyone from the management and service workers to the nurses and surgeons. Of the clinical staff, we were asking them to come in every day and treat the kinds of patients they hadn't treated in a long time and to do so at the height of a terrifying global pandemic with no end in sight. The entire HSS team pitched in and said, "This is what we have to do, and this is what we're going to do." I'll be forever proud of our organization for rising to that challenge and doing our part for New York City during this crisis.

In the process, we learned that we could move nimbly when circumstances demand action. The speed with which we were able to turn around the organization was extraordinary. Now that we know we were able to accomplish that, I know that we will feel confident in the face of future challenges should they arise.

How do you describe HSS' culture and what have been the keys to HSS' industry leadership?

HSS is a culture of excellence. We, all of us, continue to raise the bar of what it means to provide high-quality patient care. When I think of what the "secret sauce" is to earning that reputation every day, it is our culture. For me, that shows up in a uniquely strong commitment to one another. Everyone is here for our patients, of course, but beyond that, we're here for each other. All it takes is a visit to an operating room to see that commitment in action. Every member of the OR team knows that without that level of commitment, without the trust in their colleagues, they wouldn't be as effective. There's something more than a little special about knowing that you have this entire institution standing with you.

You have been with HSS for almost ten years. What has made the experience so special for you?

The people. That's what makes the choice of where you go every day so important. That's what makes me want to come in every day – knowing there are colleagues I want to work with who are committed to our HSS community, which includes not only the patients we serve, but each other. That's what makes it such a special place to work. ●