2000-05-26

MedCenter Extra: May 26, 2000

Corporate Communications, Boston University Medical Center

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/22660

Boston University
BMC Town Meetings address patient care, safety issues

Creating a safe environment for patients and employees is a top priority for the medical center and a shared responsibility of all employees, BMC President and CEO Elaine Ullian and Chief Medical Officer John Chessare, MD, said during a series of Town Meetings on Wednesday.

Emphasizing that her remarks would not focus on money or finances but rather on safety, Ullian said that quality and safety are two sides of the same coin: focusing on one results in the other.

"I believe a safe hospital is a quality hospital and a quality hospital guarantees you will be safe," she said. "Our goal is to create a place where employees want to receive care and where they, in turn, will bring their families for treatment."

Ullian cited the progress BMC has made in reducing its own medication errors. Tracking adverse drug events – and subsequently changing or developing systems to reduce or eliminate them – has been incorporated into BMC’s balanced scorecard. The hospital is making headway toward its target of reducing errors to an average of 13 per 1,000 patient days.

"It’s an incredible process we have begun with this initiative," Ullian said. "It’s not about blaming someone, but about ensuring safety for our patients."

Throughout the hospital, actions are being taken to foster a culture of safety. Ullian cited four changes in operating room procedures that standardize and formalize rules and processes. Consent forms must be signed before surgery is performed, she said, and a surgeon must verify the site to be operated upon by initialing it. In addition, anesthesia can be administered only when a surgeon is present, and pediatric patients cannot be brought into the operating room until the surgeon has made contact with a parent or legal guardian.

By taking these actions, "We are creating a patient-focused, patient-centered environment," Ullian said.

Workplace safety is a top priority. The effort includes making certain that employees commit to safety training and annual tuberculosis screenings. Safety training programs have been developed, which the administration is committed to making as accessible as possible. "We will bring our programs to your department," Ullian said.

In addition, BMC is working on a program to reduce the number of days lost to employee injuries, she said.

Patient safety is also a top priority. Because BMC’s patient population can occasionally be challenging, restraints sometimes must be used, she said. Staff members should be instructed in their proper implementation to prevent patients from using the restraints to harm themselves.

In addition, ensuring that employees are properly trained to perform their jobs – and retrained and evaluated as necessary – is very important, Ullian said, emphasizing that performance appraisals are a key element of ensuring quality job performance.

Tracking medications, which are housed in 72 locations throughout the hospital, is a challenge, she said. "You cannot expect, nor do I, one person to be responsible for 72 places." The responsibility of making certain the drugs are not expired and the proper ones are used falls not on one person, but on all.

Ullian is optimistic that employees can rise to the challenge of creating a safe place for everyone at BMC. "I believe that a high tide lifts all boats," she said. "If every single person is aware that employee and patient safety is the responsibility of everyone, we will have a better environment for all."