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Frank Sardone, President and CEO
Bronson Healthcare Group

A STRUCTURED APPROACH

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If this were a typical hospital you were entering, you'd most likely be greeted by glaring artificial lights, blaring TVs in the waiting rooms, and a startling overhead paging system. Antiseptic smells, low ceilings, dull wall colors and bare, hard floors add to a feeling of surroundings that lack, well, feeling.

But this is no typical hospital. In fact, after your car is valet parked and you walk through the front doors courteously opened by a greeter, you nearly forget you're entering a house of healing. Walk a little further on the carpeted floor (it isn't red but it sure feels like it should be) to hear soothing classical music and see an abundance of original artwork on the soft yellow-colored walls. You'll feel bathed in warmth from the natural light, complements of expansive windows, soaring ceilings and a truly inspired four-story indoor garden atrium with more than 2,500 live plants. Stay awhile in a patient room and you can smell and taste a custom-ordered meal served any time of day or night from the room-service dining menu. This place is a feast for the senses, creating an overall feeling of wellbeing.

Nearly a century after opening its first facility in Kalamazoo, Mich., Bronson Healthcare Group unveiled a 750,000-square-foot replacement hospital in December 2000, at a cost of \$181 million. Located in the heart of downtown, the healthcare group's flagship 343-bed Bronson Methodist Hospital is the most advanced medical facility in southwest Michigan. But this isn't only a state-of-art facility — it's a state of mind that centers on the patient and creating a total healing environment. Bronson hasn't just changed its physical structure — it has changed the structure of its healthcare delivery, taking a carefully planned approach to the deployment of information technology (IT) to achieve its vision of leading the nation in healthcare quality. And it's this combination of a new building, a new attitude, and new, state-of-the-art IT solutions from McKesson that has created a better healing environment at a lower cost, all to the delight of patients, physicians and nurses alike.



BUILDING SATISFACTION. *From consumers to clinicians, Bronson Healthcare Group's President and CEO Frank Sardone (far right) is focused on keeping satisfaction high. Shown with OR nurses Sally Sanders, RNFA, and Pete Olsen, CRNEA.*

Out with the Old, In with New

Nearly two decades ago, Bronson officials embarked on a plan to become more consumer-focused. It wasn't long before renovation of the facility came up for discussion. However, they discovered that it would cost \$50 million *more* to renovate the existing six structures – some of which dated back to 1905 – than to build an entirely new facility. Coaxed by a new body of research on “evidence-based design,” Bronson approached the new structure with an emphasis on space, light, color and nature to foster the healing process.

“One of the things we hear so often from visitors and patients is that ‘the new’ Bronson just doesn't look like a hospital,” says Frank Sardone, president and chief executive officer. “That's a great compliment because our goal was to create a healing space that would help patients relax as they await treatment or recover, and help their loved ones cope with the difficult job of waiting.”

Sardone is the first to point out, however, that the building is only part of the formula for Bronson's success. “We didn't assume that we could achieve all of our goals by building a building,” he says. “We looked at this project as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to not only create a state-of-the-art healing environment but also use the building process as a mechanism for cultural and operational change and become even more focused on doing what's right for our patients and our community.”

Bronson's complete formula is three-pronged. Affectionately called the “3 Cs” by employees from the top on down, the strategic goals are customer and service excellence, clinical excellence, and community accountability/long-term viability. And intertwined within the strategic plan is Bronson's IT plan, according to Sue Reinoehl, vice president of business development.

“We've had a huge philosophical change over the years,” she explains. “IT has gone from being simply a tool, a commodity that wasn't even considered in our strategic plan to a crucial differentiator required to make all of our organizational goals come true.”



BUILDING SAFETY. *Bronson's executive clinical team knows that physicians and nurses need the tools to deliver care faster and safer. That team includes (left to right) VP and CNO Katie Harrelson, VP of Quality Systems Cheryl Knapp, and Senior VP of Medical Affairs and CMO Scott Larson, MD.*

Customer and Service Excellence

Revamping the culture at Bronson Healthcare Group has elevated the organization from good to great in the eyes of patients and staff, according to Susan Ulshafer, senior vice president of human resources. And it's got the awards to prove it: *Fortune* magazine's “100 Best Companies to Work For,” *Working Mother* magazine's “100 Best Companies for Working Mothers,” Michigan Quality Leadership Award, and No. 1 in patient satisfaction for a four-state region.

“We're no longer structured primarily for the convenience of the staff,” says Ulshafer. “Above anything else, we're structured for the convenience and healing of our patients. Our staff rallied around that idea because that's the reason they went into healthcare in the first place.”

Instead of each floor offering a mix of services, the hospital's design puts the patient at the center of the care experience with a logical horizontal flow that allows one stop for services. For example, the second floor houses inpatient and outpatient surgical services, related physicians' offices and a connected car garage. If a patient comes in for outpatient testing, he/she can go to one place to have blood drawn, an EKG and X-ray.



BUILDING SECURITY. VP and CIO Mac McClurkan (foreground) and his mighty Information Services team keep IT humming at Bronson. Team members (left to right) are: Brett Mello, Patti Burchett, Gail Runge, Halle Hudson and Geoffrey DeTolve, MD.

Information technology, too, is allowing caregivers to better meet patient needs. Ulshafer points out that the solid nursing informatics environment at Bronson – which dates back to the early 1990s with the implementation of McKesson's Horizon Clinical Documentation solution – is a critical factor in the organization's low R.N. turnover rate of 6.5 percent versus the industry benchmark of 12 percent.

Statistics on physician satisfaction with IT also indicate a healthy organization, says Ulshafer, reporting a 25 percent increase from just a few years ago following successful IT rollouts for systems like McKesson's electronic medical record and Web portal (Horizon Patient Folder and Horizon^{WP} Physician Portal, respectively). "McKesson's solutions have dramatically improved the tools and services we offer to physicians, and our IS department has done an outstanding job helping physicians and clinicians understand and embrace the technology that is now available to them," she states "Clinicians know these systems help make their work easier, faster and safer."

For example, Bronson's strategy to rollout Horizon Patient Folder followed by Horizon^{WP} Physician Portal was quite effective in securing acceptance of IT. All of Bronson's approximately 450 physicians were already accessing parts of the medical record online, so it was an easy step to begin using the Web

portal to review not only X-rays and MRIs but also lab cultures, clinical documentation and so on. In less than a year of portal use, the organization reports usage at 54,000 logins per month.

Bronson is hitting the milestones toward its vision, says Sardone, by being an early technology adopter and following a step-by-step strategy for successful automation. "We've been very deliberate, especially under our CIO Mac McClurkan's IT leadership, to put the building blocks in place so that we have a very strong foundation, not only technically but behaviorally, for automation. And McKesson has come to the table with the sophisticated products and services that allow us to be successful."

Clinical Excellence

Bronson's methodical drive toward clinical excellence began with McKesson's clinical documentation system and the organization has continued to build on that foundation. While the executive clinical team recognized computerized physician order entry (CPOE) as a critical component to achieve evidence-based medicine, Bronson wants the prerequisite elements in place first. In 2000, Bronson added McKesson's ROBOT-RxTM drug distribution system to enhance pharmacy efficiency and accuracy, and installed the Horizon Meds Manager pharmacy information solution last year for better workflow. Bronson is currently implementing Horizon Admin-RxTM for bedside bar-code scanning and upgrading to Horizon Expert DocumentationTM, McKesson's next-generation clinical documentation system. Next year, Bronson plans to purchase a CPOE system and is considering McKesson's advanced clinical decision support system, Horizon Expert OrdersTM.

"Better information means better decisions, which results in better outcomes," says McClurkan. "For Bronson, that means electronically charting patient information, using CPOE to analyze and act on that information, robotics to process the resulting order, and bar coding to safely close the loop."

McKesson's robotic drug distribution system has already made dramatic improvements in Bronson's outcomes, cutting the medication error rate of the cart fills in half, according to Cheryl Knapp, vice president of quality systems. "McKesson is keeping in step with the industry's patient safety needs by providing automated systems that ensure the highest quality of care."

Bronson's focus on providing a user-friendly environment for not only patients and family but also staff is evident in the choice of clinical systems, according to Scott Larson, MD, senior vice president of medical affairs and chief medical officer. "The medical staff is ecstatic with Web access to the patient record through McKesson's Web portal. It has taken us light years from where we were, and now we're eagerly awaiting the evidence-based piece."

Physicians aren't the only staff using the portal. Nurses use it too, says Katie Harrelson, Bronson's vice president and chief nursing officer overseeing about 900 nurses. "McKesson's systems aren't limited to a physician system or a nursing system," she says. "The system design allowed us to look at who needs the information so that we are not creating parallel processes dependent on what type of clinician you are. That versatility and ease of use is key to our clinical excellence success."

Community Accountability and Long-Term Viability

While clinical systems are all the rage in the industry right now, organizations can't begin to consider the latest systems without having a strong bottom line. By implementing the entire suite of McKesson's Revenue Cycle Solution years ago and changing related processes, Bronson has enjoyed the kind of solid financial health that can fuel building a \$181-million facility and purchasing advanced clinical systems.

"Using McKesson's solutions for claims, billing and collections, we collect better data on the front end, which makes me confident that what goes out the door is correct the first time and will be processed quickly," says Ken Taft, executive vice president and chief financial officer.

Prior to implementing business performance solutions from McKesson, Taft reports that Bronson's A/R cycle hovered around 100 days, discharged but not final billed (DNFB) was in the double digits, and denial write-offs were at least \$3 million. Today, Bronson can tout industry-leading A/R at 45 days and both DNFB and denial write-offs that are cut in half.

Of course, having the latest information systems doesn't do much good if the systems aren't available. Taft recalls a time when Bronson was plagued with frequent and lengthy system outages that required many hours of data recovery and created a widely dissatisfied user community. Highly available clinical systems are now a given with Bronson's disaster recovery datacenter complete with two duplicate storage environments so that data is instantly recoverable in the case of an outage.

"The datacenter is part of our overall HIPAA compliance efforts in conjunction with McKesson," explains McClurkin. "McKesson has historically been ahead of the curve with regulatory changes and that's proven no exception in terms of HIPAA compliance."

Bronson's tremendous strides in automation and quality do leave some people outside the organization scratching their heads, but Sardone has an answer for them: "We don't think the size of your organization or town necessarily has to dictate the size of your vision."

Or, for that matter, size cannot dictate how you tackle reaching that vision. At Bronson Healthcare Group, it is the organization's structured approach to customer, community and clinical excellence – and the underlying IT infrastructure from McKesson – that has created a haven of healing. From evidenced-based design to evidenced-based medicine, from high morale to high IT adoption, from patient convenience to patient safety, Bronson is building a better way to care. ♦