

# Caring Culture and Results Focus Lead To Baldrige Award

by **Kathleen Jennison Goonan, M.D.**

**F**or too long, Mississippi ranked near the bottom in health status rankings. Now, the largest community owned hospital in Mississippi—in fact, the largest rural hospital in the United States—is poised to inspire all health-

care organizations to higher levels of performance excellence.

North Mississippi Medical Center (NMMC) is the 650-bed flagship hospital and tertiary referral center for North Mississippi Health System (NMHS), a not-for-profit, integrated healthcare delivery system that serves 24 rural counties in northeast Mississippi and northwest Alabama.

Recently named a recipient of the 2006 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in the healthcare category, NMMC provides a continuum of services, from high-tech trauma and cardiac care to hospice and long-term care, and offers expertise in 17 sub-specialties.

The majority of NMMC is located in 43 buildings on the 111-acre Tupelo campus. The organization's 3,875 employees and 277 physicians provide services, with 65% of NMMC's annual operating revenue (\$443 million) generated by acute care services.

The challenges facing NMMC are many, but foremost is caring for one of the least healthy and most medically underserved populations in the country, with adverse lifestyle choices a major factor affecting residents' health. The area also faces shortages of healthcare providers, lack of insurance and charity care burdens.

## In 50 Words Or Less

- **The largest rural hospital in the country, North Mississippi Medical Center, received a 2006 Baldrige award.**
- **Responsive leadership generated benchmark employee engagement and clinical results.**
- **Care based cost management resulted in more efficient and safer patient care and saved more than \$11 million in six years.**

### Bold Mission Combined With Servant Leadership

NMMC’s mission is, “To continuously improve the health of the people of our region.” To achieve this long-term commitment, NMMC leaders practice what they call servant leadership—an approach embodying behaviors of humility, patience, kindness, respectfulness, selflessness, forgiveness, honesty, commitment, results orientation and ego directed toward team accomplishments.

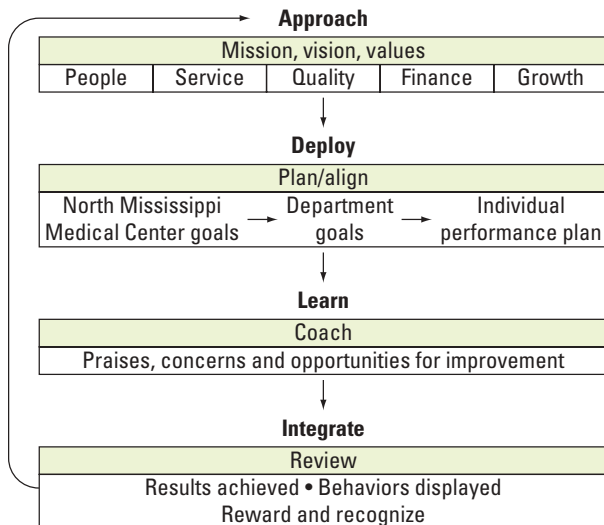
Servant leadership creates a no-secrets, no-excuses, open communication environment and a culture committed to breaking through the barriers of low expectations. A performance management process creates a partnership between employees and supervisors (see Figure 1).

NMMC leaders translate their mission into measurable actions through five critical success factors (CSFs):

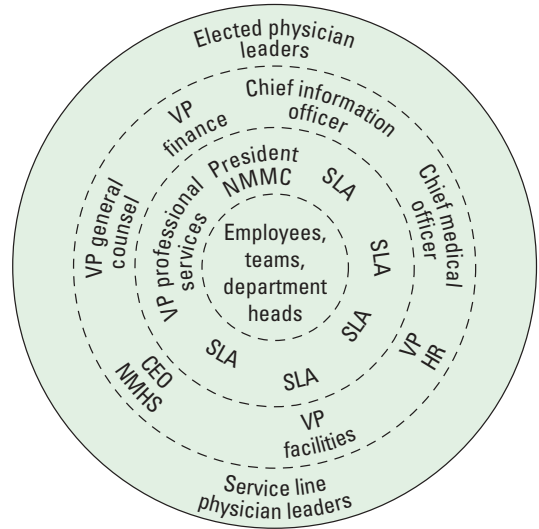
1. People
2. Service
3. Quality
4. Financial well-being
5. Growth

All leadership and management activities are organized around the CSFs to create alignment,

**FIGURE 1** Excel Performance Management Process



**FIGURE 2** Organization Chart



NMMC = North Mississippi Medical Center  
 NMHS = North Mississippi Health Services  
 SLA = service line administrator

engagement and a structure for sustained operational excellence.

The leaders engage their staff across disciplines to manage five key service lines according to their CSFs (see Figure 2). Relentless focus on the CSFs grew out of benchmarking world-class performing organizations to ensure sustained effort and avoid fads or short-term programs.

### Performance Improvement History

NMMC has a 24-year history of applying quality methods within the organization. Its model for improvement has always been plan-do-check-act (PDCA).

Beginning in 1992, this PDCA improvement team methodology was supplemented by clinical practice analysis to provide physicians with individualized performance profiles of their care management and outcomes compared to local and national benchmarks.

This sharing of comparative data engaged physicians in performance improvement and set the stage for the care based cost management (CBCM) approach.

CBCM links clinical quality and cost contain-

ment by looking beyond budget cost centers and focusing on practice variation, complication prevention and social barriers to health.

Figure 3 shows how NMMC uses PDCA to design new services that meet external and professional requirements for safety, establish evidence based practice standards and implement new processes. The end result is evaluation of both in-process and outcome indicators at monthly performance score-card reviews by service lines and departments.

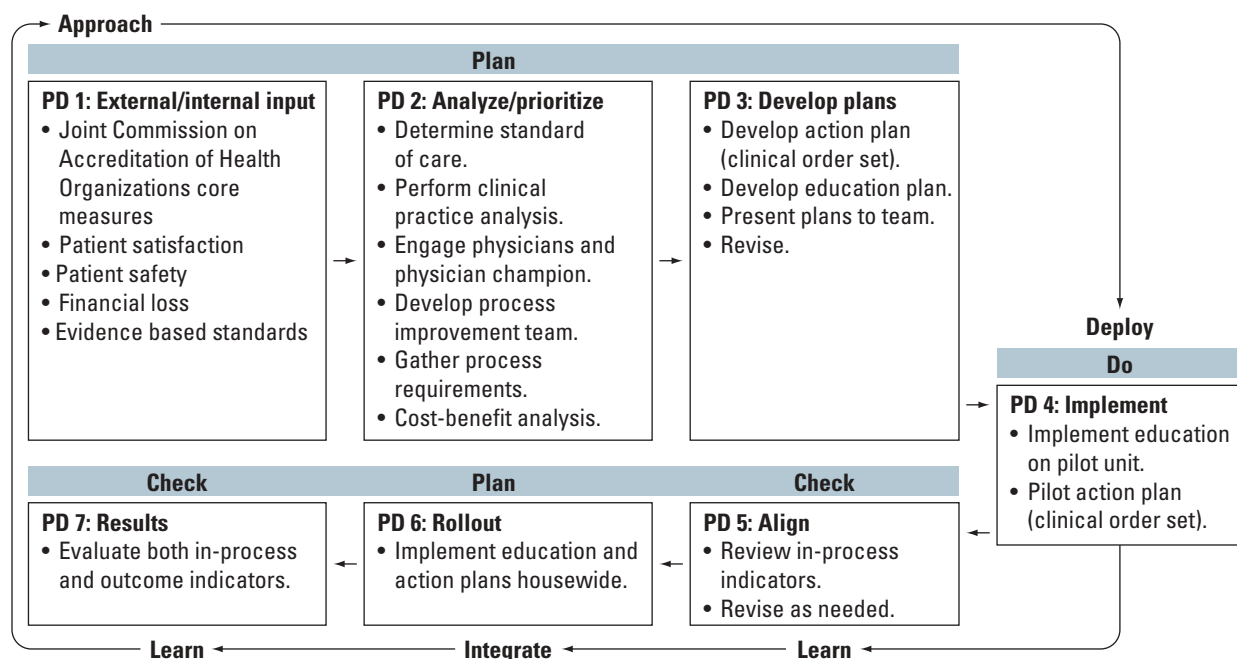
In 1996, NMMC began using the Mississippi Quality Award criteria, which were based on the *Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence*,<sup>1</sup> to identify opportunities to improve its internal leadership and management approaches. Annual critical examination of its approaches against the Baldrige criteria ensures ongoing learning and integration.

### Staff Engagement

NMMC has consistently focused on continually improving its approaches to employee and staff



**FIGURE 3** Process Design With Care Based Cost Management



PD = process design



the organization. NMMC goals get planned, aligned and deployed through departmental and individual goals.

All employees—not just those involved in direct patient care—create a personal patient satisfaction goal. During midcycle and annual reviews, feedback is solicited from at least six of each employee’s customers or co-workers to produce a 360-degree evaluation profile on each CSF. Learning opportunities are identified, and desired behaviors and results are recognized and rewarded.

**Quality Healthcare Results**

Quality healthcare results are a clear area of strength for NMMC. The results demonstrate good to excellent performance in strategic

engagement. Its CSFs are taken in a deliberate order, starting with people—the basis for achieving the organization’s mission and vision.

The system leadership team established a process to engage each employee to set individual performance plans based on organizational values and CSF based targets. Leaders regularly communicate service line and departmental performance expectations and employees’ roles in achieving goals throughout

and mission driven areas aligned with service lines, which report in-depth results for chronic illness, patient safety and publicly reported quality measures.

NMMC’s target for each health process or outcome is to be at or greater than the 90th percentile or in the top 10% in performance, using available state-of-the-art comparisons and measurement methods.

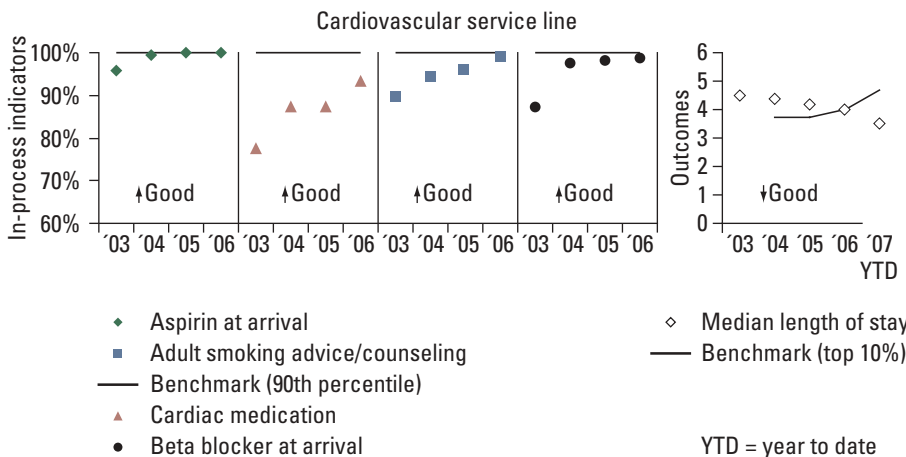
Service lines report multiple in-process and outcome variables in single graphs and describe how their clinicians apply evidence based care to achieve their results (see Figure 4 as an example).

**Improving Community Health**

NMMC makes good on its mission to continuously improve the health of the people of its region through three approaches:

1. Providing outreach and care.
2. Improving self care competency.

**FIGURE 4** Acute Myocardial Infarction Outcome



### 3. Providing early detection and prevention.

It monitors participation rates and outcomes of programs, and evaluates effectiveness through public boards and governance entities.

In 2006, NMMC provided community health services to more than 156,000 people through health fairs, screenings, education classes and immunizations in churches, shopping centers and other accessible locations throughout the rural region .

Outreach programs, including certified athletic trainers in 13 area schools, reached 30,000 student in 2002. That number has increased to more than 73,000.

The approximate numbers reached through other outreach programs are: health fairs, 173,000; mammograms, 9,500; blood pressure screenings, 6,000; wellness center, 7,000; and a free clinic staffed by volunteers, 800.

Among NMMC's innovative practices to improve self care competency is a church health ministry. More than 60 NMMC staff nurses perform screening services and teach fellow church members to take control of their own health.

The Live Well employee incentive plan proactively teaches, encourages and rewards NMMC employees for personal safe and healthy behaviors for life, as well as work. More than 2,200 of its 3,875 employees enrolled in the plan in 2006. More than 1,300 completed the plan in 2005 and were rewarded



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using a step level recognition plan based on their achievements (see Figures 5 and 6).

The board of directors and system leadership team use a program called “Healthy People 2010” and its community health assessment to identify NMMC’s key populations and community health issues.

Smoking cessation, NMMC’s top public health priority, has achieved noteworthy results. Although tobacco use in surrounding states has increased, smoking rates in the NMMC’s service area and overall in Mississippi are decreasing.

The community health assessment conducted by

the Social Science Research Center of Mississippi State University shows that the percentage of adult smokers who attempted to quit between 2001 and 2004 increased from 60 to 68%. This rate is higher than Mississippi and U.S. rates for those attempting to quit for the same year.<sup>2,3</sup>

### Information Innovations

NMMC began building its comprehensive management information system (MIS) in 1975. Today, NMMC provides access to its electronic medical record (EMR) to every caregiver throughout its system. Specialists and primary care providers in remote sites can be linked via a state-of-the-art telemedicine system.

The systemwide MIS integrates patients’ personal health records, service use and financial information across all NMMC and NMHS facilities, nonaffiliated clinics and schools with NMMC’s school health nurses.

All EMRs are filed by episode and linked to each patient’s unique identifier. This electronic medical record supports NMMC’s initiatives to ensure patient care and safety, as well as performance improvement processes and outcomes monitoring.

### Results and Recognition

The NMMC results oriented culture comes from a long history of openly comparing its performance in every CSF to other organizations. This willingness to learn and a belief that its results are never good enough has led to many honors, including the Mississippi Baldrige Excellence Award in 1997 and the Governor’s Award in 2000. NMMC also competed for and won the American Hospital Assn. McKesson Quality top honor in 2005.

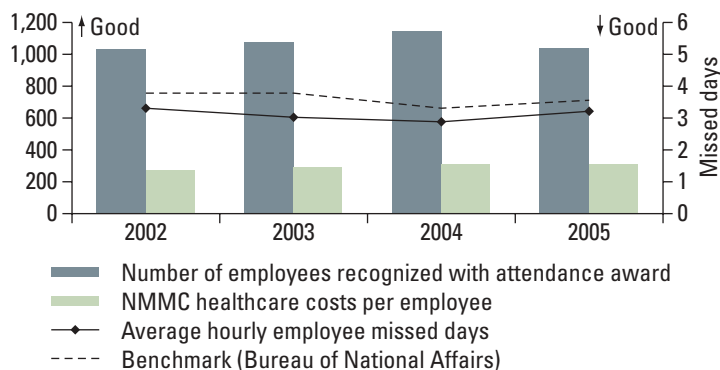
Other recognition has come for integration, management information systems, focus on people, service, finance and growth. NMMC has received numerous honors from Professional Research Consultants, a patient satisfaction survey company, for its performance in customer service in multiple service lines.

NMMC’s “likelihood to recommend” scores improved from about 52% in 2002 to 60% in 2005. In 2006, the scores approached

**FIGURE 5** Live Well Incentive Plan

<b>Behavior modifications</b> Tobacco/drug free Seat belt use Attend three health seminars Exercise program	<b>Requirements</b> Signed declaration Signed declaration Sign-in sheet Nine consecutive months, with log
<b>Health outcomes</b> Health assessment	Blood pressure, cholesterol and weight
<b>Results</b> Unscheduled absence  Safety Healthcare use	Three or four calendar quarters with no lost work time  No lost work time due to work related injuries Use less than \$250, excluding preventive care and prescriptions

**FIGURE 6** Live Well Incentive Plan Results





the 90th percentile as measured by Press Ganey Associates, a healthcare measurement and quality improvement consulting organization.

NMMC's CBCM approach to care management has yielded cumulative gains of \$11.1 million since 1999, largely as a result of reducing practice variation and medical complications.

Staff satisfaction has long been a focus, in keeping with NMMC's CSF philosophy of focus on people first. In 2006, satisfaction of all physicians, as mea-

sured by Press Ganey, showed overall satisfaction and ease of practice scores of 99% and a leadership score of 98%.

Since 2000, overall employee satisfaction exceeded the 90th percentile benchmark levels from Human Resources Inc., a survey firm.

### **Never Ending Journey**

What does the future hold for NMMC? In keeping its servant leadership beliefs and practices, the

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journey never ends. The organization will continue to frame its organizational evaluation process around the Baldrige criteria.

As CEO John Heer says, "We are on a journey. We are never done."



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### REFERENCES

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3. Mississippi State University Social Science Research Council, [www.ssrc.msstate.edu](http://www.ssrc.msstate.edu).

All photos courtesy of NMMC.

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