



# Seeking Excellence Through Baldrige

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Adventist Health White Memorial (AHWM) is a private, faith-based, nonprofit, teaching hospital, dedicated to serving more than two million people in the Los Angeles area, just east of downtown. AHWM provides a full range of inpatient, outpatient, emergency, and diagnostic services including the following care services: cancer, diabetes, emergency, heart, vascular and stroke, inpatient and outpatient surgery, limb preservation and wound care, behavioral health, orthopedics, and women's and children's including a level-3 neonatal intensive care unit. Adventist Health White Memorial, which began as a clinic in 1913 now serves the Los Angeles community with a 353-bed acute care hospital, 537 physicians, 1,971 associates, 68 medical residents, and 350 volunteers.

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True to the Adventist Health mission of “Living God’s love by inspiring health, wholeness and hope,” AHWM is deeply committed to its East Los Angeles community and is the only “safety-net” hospital in a densely populated area where most residents live below the Federal poverty level. AHWM’s service area is a federally designated medically underserved area; the payor mix is 97 percent Medicaid and Medicare.

In an ongoing effort to better serve our community, AHWM regularly holds offsite quality retreats comprised of hospital and physician leadership. At a retreat in 1997 a Baldrige winner was invited to speak and evaluate a health care self-study. At the end of this retreat, it was agreed to move from a solid organization to a Baldrige organization.

It was decided early on that this would be AHWM’s journey. Subject matter experts on various topics were valuable resources, but no additional staff was hired. These new quality and service processes were systematically hardwired into the way care is delivered and business is run.

In the beginning, speaking Baldrige was a huge learning curve. For example, learning to articulate the difference between what, how, and why, and learning the fact that more what does not help. It was important to focus on the how and why to gain insight and alignment.

The organization intentionally committed time and resources to fully develop the approach to process management, knowing that the discipline learned from developing the process management approach could easily be transitioned to other categories.

A governance structure was established with an annual self-assessment process and the goal of submitting a Baldrige application. Setting the goal to submit the application forced discipline and increased progress toward the goal. AHWM was cognizant of not overtaxing staff and created a balance between the process improvement work needed during busy times such as The Joint Commission years.

An insightful comment in one of the early feedback reports challenged AHWM. It stated the fact that the underserved environment of the hospital neighborhood and payor mix would require doing things differently than other hospitals. That comment only served to inspire AHWM to find innovative ways of looking at the challenges faced by an inner-city hospital.

Key improvements such as establishing a gang liaison officer, partnering with The East Los Angeles Community Union (TELACU), a nonprofit community development corporation founded in 1968, to foster education and training of Hispanic nurses to



*The team that leads the Baldrige effort for Adventist Health White Memorial.*

better match the workforce to the neighborhood demographics, and partnering with Mednition to design an artificial intelligent triage system, have all come to fruition.

Annually, AHWL reflects on the business framework needed to run the hospital and for 20 years the answer has been to continue with the Baldrige framework. During years when AHWL suffered financial hardship, this process and framework created more discipline to reach the goals of quality and alignment.

When recruiting new executive leadership, a copy of the Baldrige application is now provided to them to help them more fully understand the breadth and scope of AHWL. The application thoroughly outlines the organization's philosophy and approach to the business of health care.

Many doubted that an inner-city hospital could attain such a high recognition. It took years of hard work and dedication of the medical staff, leaders, and associates to attain this level of progress, earning the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

The organization changed and the base business is hardwired, which was the original goal. Additionally,

the energy level of the staff increased and improved. The patients' needs and expectations are better understood, enabling higher quality care designed to meet their unique needs. AHWL learned to listen to their customers.

The governing board members became more confident in the journey because the whys and hows were successfully articulated, making it easier for them to perform their responsibilities. To the Los Angeles community, AHWL became an organization aligned and deliberate about the actions they undertake.

In addition to the 2019 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, Adventist Health White Memorial is regularly recognized for quality, safety, and excellence by the American Heart Association, Healthgrades, Leapfrog, and U.S. News and World Report.