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Sullivan: Patient safety first-rate

HORNELL — Visible, optimistic and energized.

The description fits St. James Mercy Hospital interim CEO Jen Sullivan, as she leads the facility forward during a challenging and precarious time for small, community-based healthcare organizations across the nation.

The hospital board and CHE-Trinity Health named Sullivan interim president and chief executive officer of St. James Mercy last month, following the resignation of Mary E. LaRowe. Previous to her current appointment, Sullivan was the hospital's chief financial officer.

A hospital spokesperson told The Tribune last week that Sullivan is committed to reinforcing employee morale. Sullivan was right in the mix Wednesday at a "No Harm Across the Board" celebration. The event was an opportunity to highlight the hospital's patient safety efforts and show appreciation for employees. Staff visited the cafeteria, where they were treated to brownies and ice cream sundaes. Sullivan had lunch, and then planned to join in, helping to serve employees some sweet treats.

Sullivan said the event was a chance to "thank the employees for what they do and let them know they are doing a good job."

"People need to be thanked," she added. "Healthcare is a people business."

Mercycare employees, evening and night shift employees and workers at off-site locations were involved in the celebration as well.

Sullivan said she is optimistic about St. James' future, and she decried "self-perpetuating rumors" that the hospital is facing closure. Sullivan said once the rumors start circulating in the community, they become taken as factual.

She praised a letter written by Rhonda Peterson, president of the medical staff, which was published recently in The Tribune. Peterson wrote about "activities happening behind the scenes" to improve and sustain the hospital.

St. James is currently in talks with Rochester-based healthcare systems about partnering with the Hornell hospital. Sullivan said an announcement on an agreement, if one is reached, could be made soon.

Earlier this year, St. James announced layoffs equivalent to approximately 50 full-time employees. In June, the hospital confirmed it was applying to the New York State Office of Mental Health to discontinue inpatient psychiatric services. That process is underway.

Sullivan is also focused on physician recruitment and community outreach, a spokesperson said last week.

Sullivan said the hospital's record on patient safety is outstanding. Officials said the hospital "scores in the top ten percent nationwide for patient safety."

According to St. James Mercy Hospital's most current data on hospital-acquired conditions, there have been no ventilator-associated pneumonia in patients since 2009. The hospital also reported the following progress on patient safety, based on current data.

- No central line-associated blood stream infections.
- No falls and injuries.
- No venous thromboembolism (blood clot in the vein).

Sullivan said while other hospitals may face problems like those listed above, "They are not happening here."

St. James Mercy employs almost 700 workers. It has just under 500 full-time equivalent employees.



St. James Mercy Hospital interim President Jen Sullivan at an event Wednesday to honor employees and highlight the facility's patient safety record. Photo by NEAL SIMON