

CONNECTICUT CHILDREN'S MEDICAL CENTER (CCMC)

While it's the youngster who is in need of medical attention, Connecticut Children's Medical Center (CCMC) in effect treats the entire family.

One of only 58 free-standing facilities in the United States dedicated to the healthcare of children among the nation's roster of 5,000 hospitals, CCMC has carved itself a special niche. A couple of anecdotes help tell the story.

Because of an asthmatic condition, a three-year-old boy makes regular visits to the architecturally unique hospital located at 282 Washington Street in Hartford.

"We call him one of our frequent flyers," said Tom Hanley, director of public relations. "When he took a fall and needed some stitches, his mom drove him to the nearest hospital. When they were finished, he asked, 'Where's my ice cream? Where's my pajamas with the cartoon figures? Where is my movie?'"

When the local hospital had no answers, the child turned to his mother and said, "Get the keys. We're going home."

In another example a father wrote to Connecticut Children's: "It was just as important that you paid attention to my wife's anxiety about what was happening to our child as you did to the child's medical condition."

At the opening ceremonies dedicating Connecticut Children's Medical Center on April 2, 1996, a monument was unveiled reading, "Celebrating a new era of healing, hope and health for our children."



Larry Gold has been the president and CEO of Connecticut Children's Medical Center since March 1997.

"That's important to us," said President and CEO Larry Gold about the hospital that serves 150,000 children's visits a year for primary care, specialty clinics, emergency visits and inpatient units. "Kids take their cues from their parents on how they should react about going to the hospital."

Connecticut Children's attempts to give their young patients "a sense of ownership about the process. Just because a kid is sick doesn't mean he or she has to stop being a child," Gold said.

For example, when a child is facing the prospects of surgery, the hospital attempts to bring the family in beforehand to check out the operating room and see all the people wearing funny clothing and masks. "Experiencing that for the first time would scare any four year old" says Gold.

The youngster is allowed to put the surgical mask on and play with the blood-pressure cuffs. The technicians will even X-ray a toy to get that there's-nothing-to-fear message across.

On the day of the surgery, the child will be taken to the operating room in a battery-powered Ferrari, Barbie convertible or G.I. Joe jeep. "You don't know how many times we will hear adults say, 'Gee, I wish I was treated that way when I go to the hospital,'" Gold said.

Yet what Governor John Rowland called "one of the jewels in the crown of the state's health-care system" in his 1998 State of the State Address was not all that warmly embraced when the concept of a fully dedicated children's hospital, a relatively new phenomenon at the time, was first proposed for Connecticut in the early 1970s.

The suggestion spawned opposition and public hearings at the state level. A major hurdle was overcome when the Hartford Chamber of Commerce sponsored a study by a prestigious healthcare consultant that ended up endorsing the concept of a free-standing children's hospital dedicated to providing tertiary care for youngsters and the spectrum of pediatric services.

What was to become ranked in *Child Magazine's* top 20 among the best children's hospitals in the country evolved from the consolidation of the pediatric programs and personnel from three institutions: Hartford Hospital, Newington Children's Hospital and the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, John Dempsey Hospital.

The 123-bed facility opened on April 2, 1996. "It came about," Hanley said, "after an incredible amount of community examination of the health-care needs of children up to the age of 18. We are the only hospital of its kind in the state."

Newington Children's Hospital spearheaded the initiative with the two hospital partners to design a new children's hospital from the ground up to address the pressing





Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford is the state's only freestanding, independent hospital exclusively dedicated to the care of children.

health needs of children that were not being met in a system that fragmented pediatrics among three institutions .

Newington's location was also a problem—seven miles from the heart of Hartford with no public transportation service. Hartford's youngsters and, more importantly, their parents could hardly get there.

"Our team brought together some terrific expertise when the three hospitals consolidated," Hanley said. "Because of our national reputation, we are also recruiting excellent pediatric surgeons and physicians from all over the country. We have great capacity to do the job, from open-heart surgery to cancer cases to complex spinal fusions, right here." No longer do Hartford-area youngsters with significant health issues have to go to Boston or New York.

"Right here" is across the street from the traditional-looking Hartford Hospital with its straight lines. CCMC was designed with children in mind—lots of curves and configurations.

"Imagine a building that looks like a children's science museum," Hanley said.

Full of natural lighting, the CCMC facility broke ground architecturally for a

Creating an environment where kids feel comfortable and safe is as important as quality medical care. At Connecticut Children's Medical Center, kids get to drive themselves to the operating room and parents may accompany them while anesthesia is administered.



children's hospital, earning *Modern Healthcare Magazine's* No. 1 award for architecture. Hundreds of visitors from all over the world come to borrow ideas. There are lots of inviting things for children to look at and touch. Even the artwork on the premises was either inspired by children or created by them.

"All of that is part of the medical equation," Hanley said. "Being ill is scary enough. Having a child sick is anxiety enough for a parent. A hospital should be an inviting place."

A philosophy of family-centered care permeates the CCMC. Children and families were surveyed about adding home-like touches. Each inpatient child has a private room and restroom. Parents are encouraged to spend the night. As Hanley said, "we tried to put hospitality in the hospital."

Family sleep rooms are also situated near the intensive care unit (ICU) and the neonatal ICU. There is no charge for parents to use these facilities.

"We want the parents to be true partners in their child's health," he said, "and be involved at all levels of decision-making, from the diagnostic room to the bedside.

There is more to CCMC than "feel-good medicine," though. All of the pediatric medical specialties are available at Connecticut Children's. It is a leading center in redesigning care for children with asthma, giving them better control of their disease. The foremost pediatric authority on children's digestive diseases practices at CCMC. Experts on minimizing the pain of medical procedures and surgery performed on children are changing practice at Connecticut Children's and at children's hospitals across the country. It does great work as a teaching hospital for the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. Each year, 60 pediatricians take part in the center's residency program.

"We replenish the supply of pediatricians and doctors in Connecticut and southern New England each year," Hanley said. "I really believe we are raising the bar of healthcare quality for children."