Illinois Health and Hospital Association

Monica Cholewinski, MD, wanted to use her skills in emergency medicine in a job that would be both impactful and meaningful. She wanted to work at Saint Anthony Hospital in Chicago, her own neighborhood hospital.

“It felt like a really natural fit for me to be doing that kind of work, especially for my neighbors,” said Dr. Cholewinski, Vice Chair for the hospital’s Department of Emergency Medicine.

Saint Anthony Hospital—located between the Little Village and Lawndale neighborhoods on the city’s Southwest Side—has been a fixture in the community since it began serving patients in 1898. Today, the hospital emergency department (ED) sees 80-100 patients every day. Instead of bringing in clinicians from an outside emergency medicine group, the hospital is growing its own staff.

The hospital recently replaced ED staff from an outside group with seven full-time doctors and several physician assistants and plans to hire another physician in the coming weeks. It’s part of an effort to build a culture of camaraderie and compassion in serving its mostly Hispanic patient population and neighborhoods where between 20%-33% of residents live in poverty.

“Their heart is in the right place. They are willing to serve the underserved and they are willing to face the day-to-day challenges that come with that,” said Romeen Lavani, MD, Vice President and Chief Medical Officer, who joined the staff in 2004. “And it’s hard to get that with a third party.”

When hiring ED staff, Dr. Lavani is upfront about the challenges of caring for historically marginalized communities. He asks job candidates if they’re ready for the challenges ahead.

“It was very hard to make a third-party team understand what we are trying to do for the community,” Dr. Lavani said. “They were professionals, they were doing a good job, but they didn’t feel the need to immerse themselves completely into this mission.”

In addition to a gratifying work experience, Saint Anthony Hospital helps medical staff with loan repayments for their medical training.

Since adding new ED staff, the percentage of patients seeking emergency care who’ve left without being treated has fallen from nearly 5% to less than 2%. The hospital’s patient satisfaction rating has also improved since the staffing transition—and the ED team hopes for even more positive results to come.

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