

Dominican Hospital's CEO Sister Julie Hyer Resigns

Dr. Nan Mickiewicz Appointed Interim; John Petersdorf to Return as Executive Vice President

by Mary Bryant
and Michael Thomas

Almost 21 years after first being appointed CEO of Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital, Sister Julie Hyer announced her resignation effective this January. Sister Hyer said that she had been considering the move for some time, adding that keeping her plans secret the last few months was difficult.

Sister Hyer said that after more than two decades with the hospital, she had to wonder whether it was time for new leadership.

"Do I need a change? Does the organization need a change?" she said she had asked herself.

While Sister Hyer decided the time was right to exit, her decision left many surprised.

"After I got over the shock, it's a natural thing," said Dominican Hospital Foundation Executive Director Bob Semas. "Twenty-one years is a long time in a very challenging job."

As to the timing, Sister Hyer said that she really wanted to see the hospital through its 65-year celebration marking the Adrian Dominican Sisters' decision to "adopt" a 28-bed hospital on West Cliff Drive. That was in 1941.

Sister Hyer arrived in the early '80s, serving on Dominican's board of directors for a year before Sister Josephine Sullivan resigned for health reasons. Hyer was appointed CEO in 1985.

By then, Dominican has grown from infirmary and surgery center to the County's largest and best equipped acute care facilities with its campus on Soquel Drive. However, the hospital lacked many modern advancements.

Sister Hyer is credited with inspiring an avalanche of progress — opening a cardiac surgery center, acute rehabilitation services, the Katz Cancer Resource Center and an Intermediate Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

Dominican Hospital's Board intends to launch a nationwide search in cooperation with its sponsors, the Adrian Dominican Sisters, and hospital network Catholic Healthcare West. The search is expected to take about a year.

In the meantime, Dr. Nanette Mickiewicz, Vice President and Chief Medical Officer at Dominican Hospital, was named CEO on an interim basis beginning Dec. 1.

Joining her will be former Dominican Chief Financial Officer John Petersdorf, who left Dominican for a job at Catholic Healthcare West, where he is CHW's current Vice President for

said.

For men and women with experience in hospital management, Hyer said CHW even offers newly recruited administrators instruction in ethics. Hyer said that the practice of medical ethics requires great dedication.

"Life and religious values really require ongoing formation," she said.

Considering that Dominican Hospi-

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Performance Improvement. While keeping his CHW duties, Petersdorf will serve as Dominican's Executive Vice President at Dominican.

Dominican Hospital has 369 licensed beds between its two campuses with annual revenues of more than \$240 million. The hospital employs 1,700 workers and is affiliated with 500 physicians. There is also a group of dedicated hospital volunteers numbering almost 500.

California's Last Sister CEO

"I'm the last Sister CEO in the state of California," said Hyer, referring to women religious serving as CEOs of hospitals, a legion whose numbers were once much larger. She said there are presently six other Sister CEOs across the country.

"It is an end of an era," Sister Hyer said.

She added that now the challenge to the lay leaders is to instill in the religiously sponsored organizations the values of the Catholic Church, and subsequently integrate them into individual hospitals. She listed the values of justice, mercy, dignity and love.

"Those that have been modeled to us in our church commitment," Hyer

tal has traditionally had a Sister CEO at the helm, will the Board be predisposed to finding a female replacement?

"What is most important is that [the candidate] is the best fit," she responded.

The Dominican Sisters have a mother house in Adrian Michigan with 1,000 women in service around the globe.

There are currently 15 Adrian Sisters working at Dominican Hospital, and nearly 20 more Adrian Sisters who volunteer time at the hospital.

"They will continue working," said Hyer.

Behind the Scenes

"I think I speak for all the medical staff and the administration team when I say we truly appreciate her 20-plus years [of service]," Dr. Mickiewicz said. "Because of Sister Julie we have achieved services on the level of a tertiary care hospital."

In an interview with *The Post* in the early '90s, Sister Hyer noted that when she arrived at Dominican in the '80s the campus still wasn't offering cardiac services. She asked: How could the County's largest acute care center not offer cardiac surgery? After all, heart disease was at the time the nation's

number one killer.

Just as clearly, one new department wasn't enough for Sister Hyer.

Despite the fact that the Dominican campus was nearly complete by the time Hyer arrived in Santa Cruz, she initiated extensive facility projects including the construction of a modern emergency department, partnership with doctors in an outpatient surgery center, development of an assisted living facility known as Dominican Oaks, construction new medical offices, and the refurbishment of the former Community Hospital as an acute rehabilitation service center. That's not including upgrading intensive care services for infants, the hospital's critical care unit and a stylish front lobby remodel.

Still, what Hyer did for Santa Cruz County was by no means limited to brick and mortar. She revolutionized the way health care was delivered.

Sister Hyer's legacy will most likely be remembered for organizational changes, from helping organize Catholic Healthcare West during the non-profit organization's early formative years to working with Catholic church leaders on medical ethical doctrines that lifted the restrictions at Dominican Hospital and allowed doctors to perform necessary reproductive care services.

She also helped pioneer new physician/hospital partnership models, encouraged the innovation of a continuous improvement doctrine that placed the patient first, and advocated for women in leadership roles.

For Dominican's Foundation Director Semas, the most lasting of these progressions was the partnership with Catholic Healthcare West.

In 1941, with only the experience of operating an infirmary at the organization's motherhouse, the Dominican Sisters bought a small "hospital." After much renovation, Sisters' Hospital was dedicated. About a decade later, needing room to grow, the Sisters purchased Doctors' Hospital on Soquel Avenue. Again with expansion in mind, the Sisters undertook the construction of

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Dominican's Soquel Drive campus, opening in the late '60s

At the time, most of America's hospitals were independent, either community based, religious sponsored or for-profit.

While many religious orders had many more hospitals than the Adrian — by now the Adrian Sisters had opened a second hospital in Henderson, Nevada — most orders maintained separate governance of their facilities. That was about to change in a big way.

Catholic Healthcare West emerged as a partnership among religious orders, and has grown to one of the nation's largest religious healthcare systems. While the Adrian Sisters retain the hospital's sponsorship, CHW serves as the organizational center.

"Her tenure was during a really dramatic time for healthcare ... for hospitals and acute healthcare," Semas said.

He thinks Hyer's work with CHW and Dominican's early partnership with CHW, before most of America's hospitals were consumed by large corporations, made it possible for Dominican to survive.

"[She found] that group that

would allow us to keep our local character and achieve the economies of scale we needed," he said. "Being there at the start, we saw that [CHW] reflected our values as it developed."

Of her achievements, what would Sister Hyer like to be remembered for?

First, she said she would like to be remembered as being one of many Adrian Sisters who came to Dominican to serve the community, especially those patients who might otherwise be underserved.

She acknowledges the many changes that have occurred in the past two decades. But of all her accomplishments, what she will remember most isn't made of concrete.

"I'm most pleased about the relationships I have had with the workers, the physicians and the community," she said.

What's Next?

For Dominican Hospital, Hyer said that there is much ahead, with nearly \$250 million in facility upgrades necessary to meet the state's rigorous seismic standards and new physician partnership models in the works. For Hyer the next year will mean a break for vocational responsibilities.

As is not uncommon for

Adrian Sisters, Sister Hyer will take a one-year sabbatical. However, since Adrian Sisters never retire, Hyer is only taking a break, she said. She will continue living in the area during her sabbatical, and has one trip planned to see Eastern Europe, where her maternal

grandparents lived.

She added that she will be back at a ministry after that.

"I'm going to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit," she said.

Dr. Mickiewicz said she is hoping Sister Hyer will return in some capacity to work with

Dominican Hospital in the future.

"I think we are all very pleased that she has given us over 20 years of leadership. ... We look forward to working with her in the future in a potential advisory role," she added. ■

Dr. Nan Mickiewicz Named Dominican's New Interim CEO

On Nov. 13, Dr. Nan Mickiewicz was officially named Dominican's new interim CEO, while the hospital's board joins in a national search for a new CEO with Catholic Healthcare West and the hospital's sponsors, the Dominican Sisters of Adrian, Michigan. Dr. Mickiewicz is presently one of Dominican's vice presidents and the hospital's chief medical officer. She also works with Dominican's medical foundation.

Dr. Mickiewicz will begin as CEO on Dec. 1, while longtime CEO Sister Julie Hyer will stay until January. Hyer announced her resignation in October.

"Dominican Hospital, its medical staff, employees and volunteers will be well served by Dr. Mickiewicz with her in-depth knowledge of the issues and challenges facing healthcare providers today and into the future,"



said Sister Hyer, as part of a press release announcing the appointment. "She is a strong advocate of the patient and our local community."

Dr. Mickiewicz has been with Dominican for 13 years, assuming the role as Chief Medical Officer from Dr. Larimore Cummings in 2000.

Dr. Mickiewicz graduated from St. Mary's College in Moraga, Calif., with a degree in biology. She studied medicine at the Chicago Medical School, completing her residency and fellowship in internal medicine at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. At Cedars-Sinai she served as chief resident and completed a fellowship in infectious diseases prior to beginning her practice in Santa Cruz. Her husband, Dr. Michael Ellison, is an intensivist-pulmonologist at Dominican. The couple has four children. ■