When a medical facility is the largest rural hospital in America, there is little doubt the challenges are many, but in the case of North Mississippi Medical Center, so are the rewards. Delivering care to about 650,000 people in 24 rural counties means patients often drive 50 to 60 miles to get the health care they need. When they drive that distance, they want to have as many of their needs met as possible in one trip — so does the hospital.

This is just one of the reasons that NMMC, located in Tupelo, Miss., is a recipient of the prestigious 2006 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. It has been said that the Baldrige criteria for Performance Excellence is “the single most influential document in the modern history of American business.” If you have never heard of the award, trust us when we tell you the award program represents performance excellence that is imitated and admired worldwide.
“The Baldrige Award has changed all of us,” said David Elliott, R.T.(R), imaging manager at NMMC’s Long-town facility. Mr. Elliott said that, although NMMC has always put patient satisfaction first, working toward this award shifted its focus to a “servant” philosophy that has done a wonderful job of getting frontline personnel in step with the hospital’s mission. “Traveling the Baldrige journey of excellence creates a cultural change,” he said.

The process of applying for the national quality award is one of the greatest benefits, said Gordon Hollingsworth, B.S., R.T.(R), C.R.A., administrative director of radiology at NMMC. It demands tremendous attention to quality improvement, especially patient care. But the process of preparing for the site visits and striving to meet the award criteria takes that attention to another level and imbeds it in the culture of the organization. “The feedback is a huge benefit of the process,” said Mr. Hollingsworth. “It creates transparency in your quality measures and financials, and it brings all your staff on board, which is paramount to the process.”

NMMC’s journey of excellence began 10 years ago with state quality programs. The first Baldrige application was submitted four years ago. Few winners in the history of this prestigious award received it on the first application. NMMC submitted four applications and hosted two site visits before winning this accolade. It is an honor beyond measure, and it comes with great preparation, commitment and dedication from the top of the organization to the bottom.

The Man Behind the Award

The U.S. Commerce Department’s National Institute of Standards and Technology manages the Baldrige National Quality Program and contracts with the American Society for

Five More Winners
Focused on Excellence

2002 Winner
SSM Health Care, St. Louis

Ask employees at SSM Health Care in St. Louis what the organization’s mission is and it will roll off the tip of their tongues. “Through our exceptional health care services, we reveal the healing presence of God.” First, they know it, said Ralph Buettner, B.S., R.T.(R), director of radiology at SSM St. Joseph Health Center in St. Charles, Mo. But they also believe it and work it. “I think the philosophy of this mission statement is a big part of why we were successful in receiving the Malcolm Baldrige Award. Our values go a long way in helping us accomplish our mission of excellence in health care.”

For Mr. Buettner, this award is a huge source of pride for every employee because together they developed the mission statement. “We live our values, and the values of excellence are what the Baldrige Award is all about.”

2003 Winners
Saint Luke’s Hospital of Kansas City, Mo.

Organization and evaluation differentiate Saint Luke’s Hospital of Kansas City, Mo., from other health care facilities, said Steve Bollin, M.P.A., R.T.(R), director of radiology at Saint Luke’s Hospital and Saint Luke’s East-Lee’s Summit. “We make sure everything we do is organized and relates back to our core values and mission statement,” he explained. “When evaluating any aspect of workflow, we use a standard process improvement model and involve the entire staff to look for better ways to take care of our patients.”

Mr. Bollin said that as an administrator and radiologic technologist, he can explain things to staff from multiple perspectives, but when it all starts at the same core level, everyone understands where they are trying to go and how they are going to get there. “Planning is done with our vision as our guide — ‘best place to get care, best place to give care.’ And you see it from the top of the organization to the bottom.”

Baptist Hospital Inc., Pensacola, Fla.

Also winning the award in 2003 was Baptist Hospital Inc., of Pensacola, Fla. Carol Gilroy, R.T.(R)(M), quality assurance and quality control coordinator at the hospital, pointed to its open-door culture as one reason Baptist Hospital was selected. “Every person on staff feels like a stakeholder in the organization. We have created a no-secrets environment, which starts with the CEO.”

Employees at the hospital are well versed in the institution’s Five Pillars of Operations Excellence — people, service, quality, financial and growth — that drive the operation, and they are encouraged to contact anyone, including the CEO, at any time to discuss work issues or ideas they have for improving operations. Ms. Gilroy described their “daily line-up” where leaders and employees gather at each shift to review organizational performance. They talk about market share, where they are in comparison to other hospitals and how they are growing. “We can only affect change if we know what we need to change.”

Carol Gilroy
Malcolm Baldrige played a major role in developing and carrying out administration trade policy. Soon after he died in a rodeo accident in 1987, Congress established the award program in his honor.

Malcolm Baldrige’s accomplishments of managerial excellence “contributed to long-term improvement in economy, efficiency and effectiveness in government,” the NIST site says.

What stands out about every health care organization that has won the award is commitment to patients, said Harry Hertz, Ph.D., director of the Baldrige program at NIST. “It’s tremendous, but so is the commitment from the leaders of these organizations to their employees. These are inspired, motivational leaders. They are process driven. Their focus is not only patient centered, but also on breaking down and streamlining the organizational processes.”

About 500 volunteer examiners across the country conduct the applicant screening and site visits. The competition is stiff and the criteria demanding: leadership; strategic planning; customer and market focus; measurement, analysis and knowledge management; work-force focus; process management; and business results. This is why Mr. Hollingsworth refers to the process as a journey, as it involves tremendous quality improvement initiatives. “It’s not really something you get ready for. It must be imbedded in the culture of the organization to begin with.”

Lindsey Caffee, R.T.(R), said, “Winning the Malcolm Baldrige award puts North Mississippi Medical Center in a category of excellence. I feel honored to be an employee of an organi-
Like and added, “The examiners had lunch with our x-ray students and interviewed them. They were really impressed that they were so knowledgeable because they knew all the answers to their questions. They also were very impressed that we had an x-ray program.”

**The Hallmarks of NMMC**

North Mississippi Medical Center offers free health fairs, screenings, CPR classes, a mobile mammography unit and immunization programs. The organization makes sure every caregiver in its system has access to patients’ electronic medical records. It staffs 21 elementary and middle schools with nurses, three K-5th grade schools with certified health educators and 13 high schools with certified trainers — all as a free service to the community.

Imagine waiting to see your doctor in a clinic and having Mr. Hollingsworth, Mr. Elliott or Paula Hall, assistant technical director at NMMC, walk up to you and ask you if there is anything they can do to make your visit better. Called “rounding,” it is a task all three do every day and consider one of the best parts of their job. This practice came out of the journey toward excellence, and the idea is to interact with employees and patients to stay as close to patient care as possible. “It’s the best time of my day,” said Mr. Hollingsworth.

Patient satisfaction is key to the organization’s success, said Mr. Hollingsworth, but not at the expense of the NMMC staff. Results of the last employee survey showed a 90 percent satisfaction rate. “We focus on employee satisfaction constantly, and it’s how we develop customer loyalty. We believe it’s the reason patients drive 60 miles, past two other health care facilities, to get to us.”

Ms. Hall explained one reason for NMMC’s high employee retention rate is Ideas for Excellence. “Employees know they can come to management with an idea and be heard. Sometimes the idea is departmental. Other times it is hospital wide, but either way, they know they will be heard.

“Personally, I appreciate my staff more because they are the reason we got this award,” she added. “They know what’s going on and know their job forward and backward. They’re keeping the patients happy, and I’m really proud of them.”

Mr. Elliott agreed. “Receiving this award has been very special for all of us. Our employees work very hard, and the Baldrige [National Quality] Award validates their work.”

Although the Baldrige National Quality Program is an award program, Dr. Hertz said it actually is an educational program. The winners serve as role models in their industries, but the award is really about learning and improving. “Businesses and organizations use the application process to improve their operations, but anyone can apply the criteria,” he said. We get about 80-plus applications a year, yet over a million people download the criteria.”

The impetus for adding the health care award came from the business community, which felt the criteria could have a major impact on the industry, its costs and the preparation of students for tomorrow’s health care workforce.

NMMC also has been recognized as one of the most wired facilities in the country. Mr. Elliott said its state-of-the-art technology improves patient care and allows staff to meet and exceed physician expectations.

The organization has a common radiology information system for all its hospitals and clinics. “PACS is everywhere,” said Ms. Hall, “which cuts down on our report turnaround time. Patients can have a radiology procedure performed, see their doctor and get their results all in the same day.”

David Elliott, NMMC Longtown imaging manager. Photos by Deborah Pugh, NMMC

Paula Hall, NMMC assistant technical director.

Gordon Hollingsworth, NMMC radiology director.
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**Patient Assessment in Radiography**
1.5 credits — First-minute response in an emergency situation can depict how successful the outcome will be. Radiologic technologists have been required to contend with an increasing number of outpatients due to current changes in health care operations; as a result it’s imperative to be trained in recognition and response to emergency situations.

**Critical Thinking**
3.5 credits — To provide comprehensive patient management, radiologic technologists require the ability to reason, inquire, investigate, analyze and evaluate. Patti Jones, B.A., describes critical thinking as a systematic way to shape and form one’s thinking. In this homestudy, Ms. Jones identifies barriers to critical thinking and discusses how critical thinking impacts personal decision making. She also describes the characteristics of decision making.

**Radiographic Imaging of Child Abuse**
1 credit — Radiology’s role in detecting child abuse is profound. R.T.s must ensure that their patient is being evaluated thoroughly, promptly and efficiently, while providing the best possible images for detection of abuse. All the while, the R.T. is watching for behaviors from the parents or caregiver that may Indicate abuse. Becky Britt, M.S.R.R.(R), identifies the physical indicators of child abuse and explains the radiographer’s role in its diagnosis. Ms. Britt will also describe the steps to take when abuse is suspected.

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