

New Nurse Executive Seeks Magnet Status

Goals are to enhance patient care, make happier employees

By John F. Martinez
Harris County Hospital District

Mary Holt Ashley wants to elevate nursing at the Harris County Hospital District. She's got an ambitious, yet doable, goal to do so in two years.

The result will be improved patient care, happier employees at work and greater internal and external recognition for the hospital district.

"We're talking about improving the flow of work, the flow of patient care and making the hospital district an attractive place to work in and feel good about your work," Ashley said.

Calling the concept Center for Nursing Excellence, the designation would help the Community Health Program health centers and Ben Taub and LBJ hospitals achieve Nurse Magnet Status. The national award is earned by institutions for excellence in practice and patient care.

The recently promoted Chief Nurse Executive said a lot of groundwork has been laid to improving hospital district patient satisfaction scores and employee morale.

"I want to start a philosophy of patient care and services that is embraced by everyone in the organization, not just by nursing," Ashley said. "But it's nursing that will set the standard for the care that we all provide."

Ashley previously was the Chief Nursing Officer for Ben Taub General Hospital, but on July 11, she widened her perspective to include all nursing practices throughout the organization. Her office is now at the Administrative Building (2525 Holly Hall). She oversees nearly 2,500 nursing positions in collaboration with the Chief Nursing Officer of each facility.

"I still think about Ben Taub and still have nursing in mind; that will never change," she said. "Now my thinking is Hospital District-wide."

Her work to highlight nursing began years ago.

In her 34 years at HCHD, all of it at Ben Taub, she has championed nursing through all aspects of her career, from bedside nursing to administrator. It's no wonder her past allegiance always was to Ben Taub.

"To make all this work will require everyone from Ben Taub, LBJ and the Community Health Program working together," Ashley said. "I know we can do it; and we will."

Ashley is the first to hold the new position created by Interim President and CEO David S. Lopez. She has a doctorate degree in nursing.