



LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Matt Epstein: From the Outside Looking Forward

Matt Epstein had not spent much time inside a hospital when he agreed to serve on the Community Benefits Committee at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center seven years ago.

But after shadowing a team of nurses and taking a tour of Bowdoin Street Health Center, the commercial real estate lawyer realized just how much work goes into running a world-class medical organization and the importance of quality care at the various community health centers.

"It has been an eye-opener," Epstein says. "It is mindboggling how complicated the clinicians' and nurses' work is and the number of decisions they have to make. I have gained a lot of respect for how difficult it is to run a hospital and provide quality care. I look forward to going to the hospital for meetings. It's fun to be out of your element a little bit because you learn more. You don't get staid and complacent."

Now chair of the Community Benefits Committee and member of the Board of Trustees and the Patient Care Assessment and Quality Committee, Epstein is focused on improving the quality of patient care and ensuring equitable treatment for all individuals across the medical center and the community health centers affiliated with BIDMC. "I like to think of lay leaders as constructive institutional irritants," he says. "I think one of the functions of the lay board is to keep asking the questions that have to be asked, even if we don't know the answers."

Epstein has a family connection to BIDMC through his father-in-law, Howard H. Hiatt, a former chief of medicine at Beth Israel Hospital. However, it was at the suggestion of his law partner, Alan Rottenberg, a former chair of the Board of Directors, that he originally became involved in 2004, joining a lineage of Goulston & Storrs lawyers who have served on boards at BIDMC for the last 50 years. "I liked the mission of the hospital," he notes. "The original reason the hospital was founded is because a lot of people were not able to get care at the other hospitals. The idea of serving the community is critical to the hospital's mission."

Joining the Community Benefits Committee, which is focused on BIDMC's relationships with its affiliated community health centers as well as equitable care issues

within the hospital, interested him for personal reasons. "The equitable care side deals with minorities and issues of cultural competence at the hospital—whether minorities and people of color are treated appropriately," he says, acknowledging that since adopting his two children, Eric, 20, and Andrea, 17, who are of mixed race, he is much more attuned to issues regarding race.

"As a lawyer you represent your client," says Epstein. "What's exciting for me at the hospital is the personal involvement with the hospital's mission. You're working on what you believe, rather than taking on someone else's issues." His passion for the cause, sense of humor, and curiosity about medicine and health care economics are a perfect fit to lead the Community Benefits Committee in this time of health care reform.

Epstein—along with Eric Buehrens, interim president and CEO at BIDMC, and Stanley Lewis, M.D., BIDMC's senior vice president for network integration—have met with the executive directors and medical directors of several of the hospital's affiliated community health centers to identify key issues and develop a strategy going forward in the new health care landscape. "The community health centers are on the front lines," says Epstein. "The hospital is focusing on how we can strengthen our ties with them and work together to figure out this changing environment. I'm really fortunate to be working with BIDMC's director of community benefits, Ediss Gandelman, at the hospital to try to understand the health centers' new role. It would be wonderful if we could do it together and see how we can help each other. That would be totally consistent with the hospital's original reason for existing."

Epstein believes that to improve the quality of care at the medical center and its affiliated community health centers, clinicians should be recognized—and paid—for quality care rather than quantity of care—a major focus of the new health care reform. "It's going to be slow. It's such a big shift. It's such a total change," he says. "We are all in this together in terms of improving health outcomes." ●

"I don't know my liver from my kidney," says BIDMC trustee Matt Epstein. "But I know what I don't know. I think that there are benefits to having someone from the outside looking in at how an institution runs with a fresh eye. It's a little bit like a consultant who is new to an industry, but who can think a little creatively and notice anomalies and systems that aren't working."