

PPACA and the Pioneer Spirit

Looking for key qualities to help you lead your organization through the age of reform? Faith-based trailblazers offer some traits worth emulating.

As the healthcare industry digests the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, there has been considerable unrest and hand-wringing over just what these

changes will mean for the health systems and hospitals of America, which are struggling to comply with the statute.

It's a time when leadership is paramount and creativity is nothing less than a mandate. And for that, there are some definite role models in the faith-based history of healthcare.

Several months ago, the "Health System Benchmarks" study from Thomson Reuters discovered that faith-based health systems provided better quality of care than their secular counterparts.

In addition to dedicated professionals serving Catholic and other faith-based institutions today, we like to think that part of the reason for the success of these hospitals has more than a little to do with the lingering legacy of the founders, many of whom were sisters who arrived in their communities with little training and fewer resources.

We have been around hospitals, health systems and managed-care organizations for the better part of three decades. A history buff would marvel at the faith and determination of these pioneers. We also find some qualities in them that would make today's administrators and caregivers

stand out in an industry hungry for leadership.

Here are some of those qualities:

Unbridled courage.

Mother Mary Odilia Berger and four companions arrived in St. Louis in 1872 to flee persecution. Within months, people started calling them the Smallpox Sisters because they provided care to so many St. Louis residents who fell victim to a smallpox epidemic. Later, when the region faced a similar outbreak of yellow fever, five of these Sisters of St. Mary died of the disease while caring for the sick.

Innovation.

Mother Joseph Pariseau of the Sisters of Providence established 11 hospitals. She herself designed Providence Hospital in Seattle, built in 1882. She also saw to it that the hospital was the first building in the city to use gas lighting, and pioneered health insurance with a prepaid \$10 certificate for hospital care.

Preventive care.

The importance of nutrition and holistic health had perhaps no greater advocate in the 19th Century than Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. Yes, he developed the corn flake, but it was his brother who



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Courage

Their patients had smallpox. Yellow fever. But that failed to faze Mother Mary Odilia Berger and her fellow Sisters of St. Mary as they cared for victims of these diseases in St. Louis and surrounding cities. Some of the sisters died during the course of the work.

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built the food empire (they battled legally and personally over that). Kellogg was a Seventh-Day Adventist pioneer and the leader of the Battle Creek Sanitarium (formerly known as the Western Health Reform Institute). His insistence on proper diet, exercise and fresh air were ground-breaking. (Some of his other ideas were a bit eccentric, and the church excommunicated him.)

Tough love toward the government.

The county wasn't paying its bills to Mother M. Baptist Russell's hospital in San Francisco. The 28-year-old sister told county administrators to pay up, or their contract would be canceled.

Mission orientation. Within two years of arriving in Peoria, Ill., the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis had opened their own hospital, taken over the administration of the city hospital, and were taking patients into their homes as well. Mother M. Frances Krasse wrote these words to her sisters: "Exactly and conscientiously we want to carry out our

duties in love to our heavenly Bridegroom; carry out the works of charity to the sick in a spirit of faith; never stand still in the striving for perfection; always go ahead courageously."

Patient-centered care.

Mother Mary Xavier Clark was superior general of the Daughters of Charity from 1839 to 1845. As part of Elizabeth Ann Seton's community, she developed the book, "Instructions for the Care of the Sick." She was quite adamant that patients deserved the "best" quality of medicines. "Never get indifferent things because they are cheap; nor even when given free of cost."

Breaking down barriers.

When the future Mother Xavier Ross told her father of her desire to do God's work, his reaction wasn't charitable. "What can a woman do?" he said. In Ross' case, plenty. She was the leader of a group of Nashville, Tenn., sisters who were forced to sell everything they had to pay a debt that they didn't create.

They headed to Leavenworth, Kan., where they became known as the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth.

Despite an absence of funds, they got to work immediately, starting a school for girls and nursing the sick. They would eventually open the first private hospital in Kansas with the first trained nurse.

While the past isn't a blueprint, it can be a starting point for finding strengths that will transcend time. Look around you, and see if you can't find current healthcare leaders who embody some of these same qualities. The country is counting on it.

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For a deeper look at faith-based healthcare pioneers, read Christopher J. Kauffman's fine book, "Ministry and Meaning: A Religious History of Catholic Health Care in the United States."



Courtesy:
The Sisters of the Third
Order of St. Francis



Courtesy:
Providence Archives,
Seattle, Washington

Mother M. Frances Krasse (from left), Dr. John Kellogg and Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart.