

# At the Heart of Healthcare

by Patti A. Jamieson-Baker, MSSW, MBA

The Cancer Institute at Alexian Brothers Hospital Network had its annual Family Weekend Retreat recently. For this fun-filled, profoundly moving program, we invite families with one parent who is in active cancer treatment. We try to invite patients who have children of an age to benefit from the retreat program.

The weekend includes activities for the patients, significant others, and for children of all ages. Some activities are just for fun, and some—such as art therapy for children and a men's caregiver support group—have a more serious intent.

As my staff and I watch the families arrive on Friday evening, most look a little nervous, as if they are not quite sure what they have gotten themselves into, or why they even signed up for this event. The parents and children are guarded, and there are few interactions between the families.

After the Friday night pizza party, we see a change start to take place as some family members begin to take a chance and allow others into their space. On Saturday, we keep everyone very busy. A special facilitator works with the high-school-age kids, and a very structured program engages the attention and energy of the younger children. Parents spend the day free from the kids, going to classes, seminars, and support groups. Saturday evening we have a barbecue, karaoke, and a pool party. Finally, the weekend retreat wraps up with the Sunday morning fellowship service.

Why am I devoting this column to writing about our retreat weekend? In our healthcare world of regulations and reimbursement issues,

sometimes it is important to take a few moments to reflect and remember *why* we all chose to work in the oncology field. At our retreat, when we hear a mother stand up on Sunday morning and talk about how the weekend program has brought her family together and how, for the first time, they have talked about her

cancer diagnosis and treatment—we remember why we entered this field. When we hear a ten-year-old boy say that he now knows he is not the only kid whose mom is in cancer treatment—we remember why we chose, and continue to choose, to work in oncology.

This weekend retreat also renews our staff and draws us all closer together as a team. Many of us involve our families, which gives our immediate family members a chance to better understand why we do what we do everyday.

Then, too, this special weekend has given us an opportunity to connect with the wider community. We have been fortunate to partner with a local corporation that serves as the sole sponsor of the Family Retreat Weekend. Rick Korte, president of the Heidenhain Corporation, and his staff generously offer support throughout the weekend, giving to the program not just financially but with their volunteer time as well. This retreat allows a high tech company the opportunity to give back to the community and make a difference in the lives of many people.

In the midst of ever-changing healthcare policies and uncertainty, I am grateful for our retreat and the chance it offers to bring us back to the basics of our commitment to our oncology patients and their families. ☐



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