

Montefiore investing to improve health care on the Sound

BY LINNET TSE

Calling their recent takeover of the Sound Shore Medical Center a "natural opportunity," Montefiore Health System officials reaffirmed the organization's commitment to investing in and improving health care on the Sound at The Larchmont-Mamaroneck Local Summit's monthly meeting at the Nautilus Diner, Tuesday, March 18th.

The packed meeting attracted an unusually large number of residents from the Sound Shore communities interested in learning the fate of the Sound Shore Medical Center of Westchester. In November 2013, Montefiore acquired the Center's facilities after it lapsed into bankruptcy; facilities included Sound Shore Medical Center, the Dorothea Hopfer School of Nursing and the Schaffer Extended Care Center, all in New Rochelle, as well as Mount Vernon Hospital.

Throughout the discussion, Montefiore representatives - Dr. Andrew Racine, Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer of the Montefiore Medical Center and Executive Director of the Montefiore Medical Group; Lynn Richmond, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff for the President and CEO at Montefiore Medical Center; and Anthony L. Alfano, Executive Director, Vice-President of Montefiore - New Rochelle - sought to reassure the audience of Montefiore's interest in doing what is best for the community. All three stressed Montefiore's interest in partnering with the community and local physicians in order to identify what the community needs and invest accordingly.

Montefiore's Approach to Healthcare and Partnerships in Communities

The panelists began by providing the audience with a sense of Montefiore's values and approach to health care. Citing Montefiore's mission statement - "To heal, to teach, to discover and to advance the health of the communities we serve" - Dr. Racine explained that Montefiore differentiates itself by focusing on the question "What can we do to keep people well?" and working very closely with communities to meet their needs.

Richmond pointed to Montefiore's experience and successful track record of turning around financially ailing medical centers, including the former Our Lady of Mercy Medical Center in the Bronx, which is now the site of their Wakefield Campus. Using their experience in the Bronx as an example, she also spoke of Montefiore's interest in establishing integrated regional systems of care that not only provide comprehensive primary and outpatient specialty care, but also include a variety of partnerships with schools, homeless shelters, and more, and provide related health services such as dental care and home health care, thereby addressing a community's broad

range of health care needs.

Montefiore's Expansion in Westchester

Richmond explained that Montefiore's acquisition of the Sound Shore Health System facilities enabled it to build on its existing Westchester footprint, expanding on the twenty Westchester-based practices it already had. She noted that Montefiore recently purchased the former Kraft office building in Tarrytown,

He explained that Montefiore immediately undertook an assessment of the physical plant and has already invested more than \$20MM in the facilities, taking care of the most pressing needs including HVAC, security, lighting, painting, flooring and new furniture to give the facility a facelift. He noted that there are many more plant improvements still to come.

In terms of specific services, which several members of the audience inquired about, Alfo-



Left to right: Anthony Alfano, Executive Director, Vice-President of Montefiore - New Rochelle; Lynn Richmond, Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff for the President and CEO at Montefiore Medical Center; and Dr. Andrew Racine, Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer of the Montefiore Medical Center and Executive Director of the Montefiore Medical Group.

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where it will be housing the approximately 1600 administrative and back office employees that serve its Bronx and Westchester operations and that it will be consolidating its lab services at a facility in Mt. Vernon.

According to Richmond, the Mt. Vernon and New Rochelle hospitals will be treated as distinct units, not joint as they were under the Sound Shore organization. In terms of the recently announced partnership with White Plains Hospital, Richmond commented that it is too early to discuss as the details are still being worked out. Asked about any possible plans for the former United Hospital facility in Port Chester, Racine said she was not aware of any such discussions.

Status of Montefiore New Rochelle Hospital

According to Anthony Alfano, the new director of Montefiore New Rochelle, their first priority was to “stabilize the workforce,” which had endured a lot of turmoil during the bankruptcy period. Another area that received immediate attention was the emergency department. In addition to getting a facelift, Montefiore enhanced the number of practitioners in the emergency room – physicians, physician extenders, and nursing staff – in order to improve throughput and decrease waiting times. They also introduced a “Fast Track” system aimed at quickly attending to “treat and release” patients. Longer-term, Montefiore is looking to expand the emergency department, which they recognize is a critical service for the community.

Responding to comments from the audience about the poor physical condition of the New Rochelle hospital, Alfano acknowledged the physical deterioration of the facilities when Montefiore assumed ownership in November.

no explained that Montefiore is still in the process of evaluating service needs of this community. Services that existed under Sound Shore – including palliative care – will be maintained as is for the time being, while the need for services that had not previously been provided – such as psychiatric care – will be evaluated as part of the needs assessment that is underway. He indicated that Montefiore would be investing to enhance or add needed “lines of service” once those had been identified.

Other Questions Raised by Residents

Q: *How can Montefiore afford to acquire and invest in hospital facilities like Sound Shore?*

A: Dr. Racine explained that Montefiore’s financial model is based on contracts with insurance companies, under which Montefiore assumes the full risk for its patients. This “provider-based approach” shifts the financial risk from the insurance companies to Montefiore. According to Dr. Racine, “if we are not beholden to the reimbursement schedule, we can do more for the patient.” By focusing on prevention and keeping people well, and operating very efficiently, Montefiore has been able to save money – money that they are investing in programs and facilities.

Q: *Can Montefiore help deliver health care to our undocumented residents?*

A: The speakers acknowledged that the Affordable Care Act left out the undocumented and that health care providers must keep looking for opportunities to address this issue, but did not offer any solutions.

Q: *What is the difference between WestMed and Montefiore?*

A: An organization like WestMed provides comprehensive ambulatory care – care

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ent-care.

Dr Posner comes to Sarah Neuman from Jewish Home Lifecare's Bronx Division, where she served as Medical Director for the past 6 years and worked for thirteen years. She has trained and received board certification in Internal Medicine, Nephrology, Palliative Care and Hospice.

"We are delighted that Dr. Posner is joining

Youth Mental Health First Aid launches as part of Safer Communities Initiative

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ant equip them to come up with the right response.

Youth Mental Health First Aid is a nationally recognized program that teaches participants to provide "first aid" to youth, ages 12 to 18, for a range of mental health challenges. The training will be available to adults throughout the county thanks to a partnership between Westchester Jewish Community Services and the Department of Community Mental Health. It is aimed at those who spend time with young people in schools, faith-based organizations, community groups, sports leagues, camps and recreation programs.

"We're very excited to roll this out in Westchester," said Alan Trager, CEO of Westchester Jewish Community Services, the agency that will provide the training. "This will empower people to identify and approach youth who may be struggling and to link them to the professional help or other supports they need before issues escalate."

At the presentation, the training was described and demonstrated. An adult, who graduated from the program, as well as a young person, who directly benefited from the program, shared their experiences. Program trainers also gave a brief demonstration of how the two-day, four-hour training sessions will be conducted. A booklet that highlights the approach of the Youth Mental Health First Aid program, in addition to statistics and useful resources, was distributed to attendees. To access the booklet online, visit <http://bit.ly/1fAeKi2>.

Education, and Clinical Centers (GRECC) for the Veterans Health Administrations facilities.

Sarah Neuman Center is the Westchester campus of Jewish Home Lifecare. It is a 300-bed, long-term skilled nursing care facility in Mamaroneck, that offers nursing home care, a full range of post-surgical, disease recovery and short-stay rehabilitation, an adult day program and respite care.

The training aims to give adults the necessary tools to help a youth experiencing a mental health challenge or crisis wherever they may be – at home, school or in the community. Interested organizations or individuals can sign up for the eight-hour training course that will teach participants to provide "first aid" to children and teenagers for mental health challenges including depression, suicidal thoughts, self-injury, panic attacks, substance abuse, reaction to trauma, aggressive behavior and acute psychosis.

Participants will learn a five-step method to respond to young people facing a mental health challenge:

1. Assess the risks of suicide or self-harm, and take these seriously
2. Listen empathetically and without judgment
3. Provide reassurance and information about options and resources
4. Enlist professional help
5. Encourage the young person to seek support from family, friends and others

The Westchester Department of Community Mental Health in partnership with Westchester Jewish Community Services will host the first training on May 13 and 16 from 9 a.m.-1p.m. It will be open to up to 30 participants and free of charge. For information on more training sessions in Westchester County contact the Department of Community Mental Health at (914) 995-5225.

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that is on an outpatient basis – while Montefiore, with its hospitals, provides integrated health care. Dr. Racine explained that Montefiore is very interested in partnering with health groups such as WestMed.

Q: How will Montefiore's takeover of Sound Shore impact local doctors?

A: According to Dr. Racine, there is "no downside . . . only upside" for local physicians. He indicated that Montefiore would be speaking with private physicians and physician groups about potential partnerships. Private physicians might be invited to partner with the Montefiore Integrated Provider Association (MIPA) to become part of its managed care program. For a group such as WestMed, Dr. Racine anticipates that there might be ways in which Montefiore could complement its services.

Q: What can be done about the flight of

quality local physicians due to the uncertainty surrounding Sound Shore's financial woes?

A: Alfonso explained that by "changing the institution itself" – by making both plant and programmatic changes – good doctors who had left would likely be drawn back by word-of-mouth. "Good doctors want to be where their patients get good care," something that Montefiore is committed to providing.

This breakfast forum was hosted by The Larchmont/Mamaroneck Local Summit, an informal community council that seeks to make life better for all in the community. Its monthly public meetings are usually held at the Nautilus Diner in Mamaroneck at 7:45 a.m. on the third Tuesday of the month; however the April meeting will take place on Tuesday, April 8th and will address the Common Core Standards.

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