

# PASSIONATE DEDICATION TO THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE LEADS TO TOP ACCOMPLISHMENT

Case Study

100 Top Hospitals

Silver Cross Hospital

Silver Cross Hospital has served the east side of Joliet, Ill., about an hour's drive from Chicago, for more than 100 years.

Although Silver Cross had a rich history, the hospital began to struggle in the 1990s — becoming known more as the “hospital on the poor side of town,” rather than a cutting-edge healthcare provider. Low levels of patient satisfaction, admissions, and revenue left senior management looking for a compelling reason for patients to choose Silver Cross.

Over the next 10 years, Silver Cross' employees across the organization, from high-level leaders to physicians and nurses to frontline staff, passionately refocused the hospital's resources and dedication toward what they knew mattered most: making the patient experience the best that it could ever be.

## FROM UNCERTAINTY TO ELITE STATUS

The plan worked. Silver Cross' commitment to clinical quality, patient safety, financial stability, and customer service earned the hospital the designation of 100 Top Hospitals® National Benchmarks award winner for five consecutive years (2004-2008).

This level of high performance along with steady, increased improvement also earned Silver Cross the 100 Top Hospitals®: Everest Award for National Benchmarks. The honor, the highest in the 100 Top Hospitals® program, awards the best of the best — the hospitals that have a combination of excellent current performance and long-term improvement.



It confirms that Silver Cross Hospital is performing in the top 10 percent in the country across all measures of performance.

Between 1995 and 2005, net revenue and volume increased by 100 percent. The hospital is now the unequivocal market leader in its service area, setting the standard of care for the competition. The hospital once thought of as a neighborhood hospital is now an impressive healthcare network, serving some of the fastest-growing counties in Illinois.

*“To make the hospital better and to make it a destination hospital, we wanted our customer service to be the very best.”*

**Paul Pawlak**

CEO  
Silver Cross Hospital



## SILVER CROSS HOSPITAL

**Location**  
Joliet, Ill.

**Category**  
Large Community Hospitals

**Awards**  
100 Top Hospitals®: National Benchmarks  
2004-2008

100 Top Hospitals®: Everest Award for National Benchmarks  
2008

**Scope and services**  
Since 1895, Silver Cross Hospital has grown from a 33-bed, two-story hospital into an impressive healthcare network featuring a 304-bed acute care hospital with a team of 2,500 physicians, employees, and volunteers.



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## HOW THEY DID IT

The “secret” behind Silver Cross’ success seems simple, but isn’t. According to CEO Paul Pawlak and his top staff members, the hospital accomplished its key goals with a just-right mix of the following factors: a first-priority focus on customer service; strategic performance management; a heightened urgency for uncompromised clinical quality; a revitalization of the well-established, patient-first culture; and the desire to grow business and meet more patients’ healthcare needs, better.

### THE BEST IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

Pawlak says the road to the hospital’s elite status began with service, “To make the hospital better and to make it a destination hospital, we wanted our customer service to be the very best.”

Pawlak also knew that the process couldn’t be complicated; it needed to be something that every staff member could perform day in and day out.

The Silver Cross management team came up with six core behaviors that now drive the hospital’s award-winning patient services:

1. Always introduce yourself.
2. Wear your name badge appropriately.
3. Always give explanations of processes.
4. Escort patients and visitors.
5. Keep the environment clean.
6. Always greet patients, visitors, and colleagues.

“When you think about these behaviors, it’s really not rocket scientist stuff,” Pawlak says. But as Pawlak — and patients — have seen first-hand, the behaviors are highly effective when put into daily practice.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BENCHMARKING

Organizational goal-setting and performance benchmarking are also factors in the hospital’s triumphs, says Pawlak.

The hospital uses a management incentive plan, partially tied to organizational results. Leaders share key goals. And in recent years, the hospital has formalized its performance improvement program.

For instance, clinical quality is one area where hospital leaders continually appraise performance, using national measure sets and strategic benchmarking. Annual quality goals drive monthly score cards, and everyone, including physician leadership, works as a team to meet the goals.

Additionally, when it comes to reaching key objectives, all staff members are kept informed of how the hospital and individual departments are doing.

### A COMMITMENT TO CONTROLLING COSTS

Silver Cross has also made great strides in cost reduction and control, even as it has grown. The hospital reduced overall costs 25 percent early on in their transformation, and they continue to keep a tight lid on cost increases.

“We did not allow creep. We use the Thomson Reuters benchmarks for staffing and supplies, and to set annual targets. Our employees understand this and are accountable for their budgets and costs,” Pawlak says. “Instituting the discipline to control our expenses and be flexible gave us the breathing room to next focus on customer service and clinical outcomes.”

### THE POWER OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

An important objective of the 100 Top Hospitals® Everest Award is to recognize hospital boards and senior leaders who enable a culture of performance improvement and consistent growth. At Silver Cross, it has been all about strengthening a culture already deeply in place.

In fact, the deep-rooted culture of high performance at Silver Cross, and the staff’s strong desire to make a difference, are two of the hospital’s finest assets, says Mary Bakken, the hospital’s Chief Operating Officer.

Bakken and others realized early on that customer service and improvement are personal at Silver Cross. After all, as Bakken says, “We have employees whose mother was born here. They were born here. Their kids were born here.”

Pawlak and his staff knew there were benefits to boosting and celebrating those long-established



organizational values to drive improvement. Accountability, alignment, and integration were already factors the staff worked at and understood.

#### A CLEAR MISSION FOR THE FUTURE

Silver Cross Hospital management has not only strengthened the quality of care and patient satisfaction at the Joliet hospital, but has also kept an eye on growth and the future.

Over the years, the hospital created a comprehensive ambulatory network throughout its region. The network includes eight satellite facilities with nearly 100 physicians and outpatient services. Recently, Silver Cross opened a high-tech outpatient medical services building and a physician office building to meet patient needs.

To further keep pace with the growing population and ensure quality healthcare for its communities, Silver Cross is building a \$400-million, state-of-the-art replacement hospital. They plan to open the new facility in 2012.

Of course, Silver Cross is not abandoning its strong neighborhood roots and the patients who have played a part in its success story. The new facility will be just three miles from the historic campus.

The foundation of the hospital's elite accomplishments will not be lost in the transition, either, according to Pawlak and staff. Everyone at Silver Cross recognizes why the hospital still exists — to make a difference in people's lives with quality, life-saving care and unmatched customer service.

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