

Barton Hospital turns to Disney for lesson in guest services

By Phil Galewitz, Kaiser Health News

Barton Memorial Hospital sent its 900 employees back to school in June to learn how to provide better service. Their instructor: The Walt Disney Co.



“Disney understands guest services,” said Kathy Cocking, Barton’s vice president of operations. “And we’re not as good as we want to be.”

In classes at the hospital, two Disney consultants taught employees how to think more creatively and improve their attitudes toward their jobs. They stressed that patients want not just good clinical care, but personal attention, too.

Barton is one of a growing number of hospitals seeking help from the entertainment giant whose theme parks and resorts are famed for meticulous landscaping and rigid employee service standards.

Since October at least 25 hospitals have signed on for multi-year consulting agreements that can include visits to Disney World to observe customer service operations as well as employee training sessions at the hospitals, said spokeswoman Stacey Thomson.

Disney officials attribute the increase in health consulting business to a provision in the new federal health law that requires Medicare payments to hospitals in 2012 reflect

patient satisfaction ratings.

Medicare has been publishing patient satisfaction scores on its Hospital Compare website since 2008. Starting in October 2012, Medicare will begin withholding 1 percent of its payments to hospitals. That money – \$850 million in the first year – will go into a pool to be doled out as bonuses to hospitals that score above average on several measures, including patient satisfaction.

“Everyone understands these scores will impact our livelihood and our future,” Cocking said. “That’s why we had Disney come here.”

In response to advice from Disney, the South Lake Tahoe has revamped its employees’ dress code, improved its landscaping and changed its hiring to focus on applicants’ attitudes, she said.

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