

2008 Outstanding Rural Health Organization

Gerber Memorial Health System

Gerber Memorial Health Services is “The Little Hospital That Could” change the vision of rural health care in Fremont, Michigan forever.

As a key mover of the area’s Health Improvement Council, an organization made up of several county health care agencies, GMHS took it upon itself to be a driver of a new vision for health care in Newaygo County. While continuing to serve as the only hospital in the county, one which has consistently delivered excellent “sick care” to its community, GMHS determined it was time to lead the charge for improving the health of all members of the community. No more would GMHS wait for people to get very sick to enter its sphere of influence - it would become a moving force for prevention and wellness throughout the area.

But how does a hospital organization, one that has concentrated its entire existence on taking care of sick people, drive a sea-change to become a “health care” entity, rather than one that only focuses on “sick care”? GMHS created a totally new, free-standing wellness facility named Tamarac, the Center for Health and Well-Being. Tamarac was to be a place where trusted, professional guides encouraged and supported every individual’s desire to become healthier, in mind, body and spirit. It would be a medical wellness center, not just a fitness club, so that those arriving at its doors following surgery or trauma would first be rehabilitated, then transitioned to a world of maintaining and enhancing the therapeutic work that had already been accomplished.

As Tamarac was developed, a new vision emerged for GMHS, to be a source of renewal, in sickness and in health. Not only would GMHS help people get well if they were sick, but it would also help get them healthier, whether they were ill or already in relatively good health. This new vision stands to save dollars and lives in one of the unhealthiest states in the nation, as well as provide the financially struggling hospital with a new revenue source to compensate for the shortfalls in Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement.

Tamarac opened on December 17th, 2007 and by the time Tamarac had been operational for a month, over 1200 people had become members. GMHS has taken an innovative approach to growing health care problems in its community and provides an example to health systems in communities throughout rural America.