A 104-Year History of Serving Dallas

An Interview with Joel Allison,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Baylor Health Care System

Joel Allison

COMPANY BRIEF *Baylor Health Care System (www.baylorhealth.com) is a network of hospitals, primary care and specialty care centers, rehabilitation clinics, affiliated ambulatory surgery centers, and the Baylor Research Institute. One of the largest private-sector employers in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, Baylor employs more than 15,000 people and has more than 3,000 physicians on its medical staff. Baylor University Medical Center, the system's flagship hospital, is a major patient care, teaching, and research center for the Southwest.*

What does the Baylor Health Care System brand stand for?

Baylor has a 104-year history of serving Dallas and its surrounding areas, and that's extremely important for our brand awareness. I think people equate Baylor with values of integrity, servanthood, a commitment to quality and innovation, and good stewardship. There's an expectation that Baylor will perform and continue to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

In improving the health of the Dallas/Fort Worth community, what services does Baylor provide?

Baylor exists to serve all people through exemplary health care, education, research, and community service. When patients come to us, we provide a broad spectrum of care, from prevention and wellness to primary care and tertiary care, including services like our internationally recognized organ transplant program. Our focus is on continuing to deliver the highest level of safe, quality, and compassionate care to the communities we serve.

We support our clinical excellence with our commitment to medical education and research. We are an academic teaching facility, and we annually train more than 200 residents and fellows at our flagship campus, Baylor University Medical Center. We also have a family medicine residency program at Baylor Medical Center at Garland [Texas]. We serve as a rotation site for other allied health professionals and nursing students of the Baylor University School of Nursing.

We also support our commitment to patient care and clinical excellence through the Baylor Research Institute. We bring innovative treatments from the laboratory to the patient's bedside, a method we refer to as translational research. One component of BIIR – the Baylor Institute for Immunology Research – has a goal of developing novel approaches to treating diseases such as cancer and autoimmune and infectious diseases, as well as looking at ways to reduce organ transplant rejection. Also at Baylor, there is a significant amount of work underway by researchers aimed at curing colon cancer and treating Type I diabetes through islet cell transplantation. In addition, we are conducting important research through the Baylor Institute of Metabolic Disease, where scientists are studying inherited disorders of body chemistry.

To serve our community, Baylor operates one of only two level-one adult trauma centers in Dallas. And, each year, we offer hundreds of health screenings and launch valuable community health initiatives, including programs to reach the medically underserved. In 2007, we reported more than $390 million in community benefits.

Have you been happy with the level of expertise you've been able to draw into the Baylor organization?

Definitely. We want to be the employer of choice and attract the best and brightest to Baylor. Because of our mission and vision, we've obtained some of the nation's leading physicians, researchers, nurses, and therapists.

In your opinion, what is broken within the American health care system?

There is currently a void in national health care policy in making sure that all people have access to insurance and quality health care. Remedying that takes effort on the part of elected officials as well as individuals who are engaged in the delivery of health care. But I believe it can be done.

How has technology impacted the care that Baylor Health Care System provides?

Technology supports our strategy of redesigning the way we deliver care. As we expand, we want to implement a full electronic health record, which will make it easier for patients to access our system and for our physicians and nurses to treat our patients. In addition, Baylor has always had a commitment to innovation, and we want to be current in the technologies we offer. For example, at the Baylor Neuroscience Center we are among the nation's first to have the Gamma Knife® and CyberKnife technology in the same physical location, offering patients advanced treatment options.

You've been with Baylor for 15 years. What made you feel it was the right fit for you when you took the job?

Baylor Health Care System is so well known and respected for its commitment to clinical excellence that, when I was given the opportunity to join it, I did not hesitate. It is nationally recognized for its commitment to safe, quality, and compassionate patient care, as well as its caliber of staff. I considered it a blessing that I was asked to join the Baylor Health Care System.

How would you characterize Baylor's relationship with the Dallas/Fort Worth business community?

We are very fortunate to have a dynamic business climate. Baylor has an excellent relationship with the business community, which health care systems in other parts of the country may not enjoy. That relationship comes from the business community's understanding of the economic impact that health care brings to this region. ●