

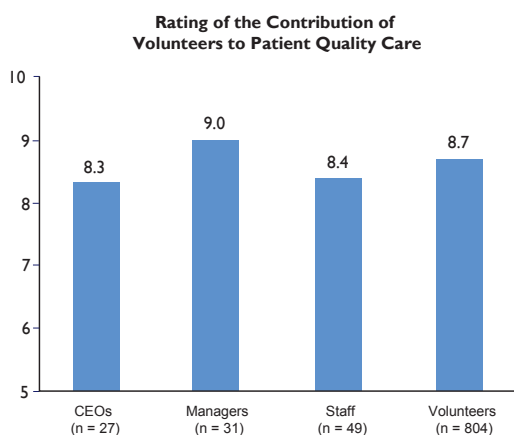
Ontario Hospital Volunteers: How Hospital CEOs Perceive their Contributions

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This fact sheet examines how contributions of volunteered time are viewed by senior hospital management. It is based on a study of 27 hospitals in and around the greater metropolitan area of Toronto, Canada. CEOs, or their designates, were asked a variety of questions about how they perceive the volunteer resources at their hospitals, including: What contribution do volunteers make to the quality of patient care? How essential are volunteers in the delivery of healthcare? Are volunteers cost effective? Results show that CEOs have a high regard for professionally managed volunteer programs, and that they see these programs as integral to their services.

The Contribution of Volunteers to the Quality of Patient Care

Volunteers contribute to the quality of patient care in hospitals by performing non-medical services in two main areas: contributing to patient satisfaction (e.g., spending time with patients, establishing trust), and reducing the anxiety of family members (e.g., providing human contact and emotional support). When CEOs were asked how, on a scale of one to ten, they would rate the contribution of volunteers to the quality of care, where one means not at all, and ten means indispensable, they rated the volunteer contribution at an average of 8.3.

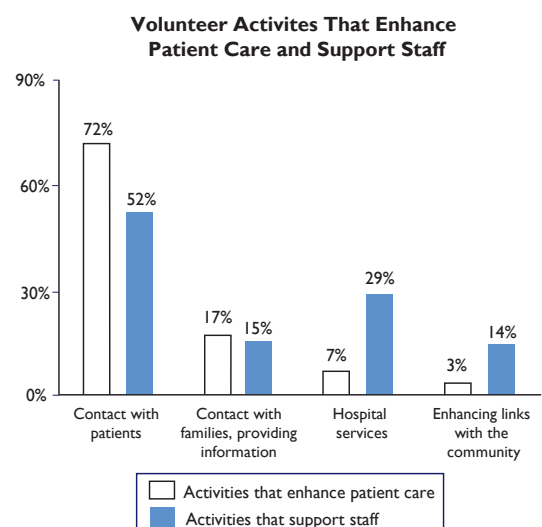


These views are very similar to those of managers of volunteers, hospital staff, and volunteers themselves.

The Role of Volunteers in Healthcare Delivery

CEOs were asked to identify the volunteer activities that enhance patient care. The most frequently mentioned, by 72% of CEOs, were activities that provide patients with human contact. The next most frequently mentioned (17%) was interacting with families and providing information. Less frequently mentioned, although still valued, were labour-intensive activities such as helping with the mail or running the reception desk (7%), and activities that enhance the hospital's links with the community (3%).

When asked to identify volunteer activities that provide the most support to staff, CEOs mentioned patient contact most frequently (52%). Next most frequently mentioned (29%) was providing assistance with hospital services (e.g., helping with the mail, running the reception desk). Less frequently mentioned were activities relating to family contact (15%) and enhancing the hospital's links with the community (14%).



Cost Effectiveness of Volunteer Programs

Without exception, all hospital CEOs said that they believed that their volunteer programs were cost effective. Implicit in their responses is the assumption that the benefits delivered by volunteers easily outweighed the indirect and direct costs of volunteer programs, such as those incurred in recruiting, training, and managing volunteers. In general, CEOs perceived volunteers as not only providing valuable services in the hospital at little cost, but also as playing an important public relations role through their frequent interactions with patients and their family members.

Challenges of Hospital Volunteer Programs

When asked to name the challenges their hospitals faced in expanding their volunteer programs, nearly two thirds (72%) of CEOs identified a lack of resources to recruit, train, and supervise additional volunteers.¹ Nearly one third (30%) reported that there were certain positions that they were unable to fill from their existing pool of volunteers. One quarter (25%) stated that the supply of volunteers was limited. In many cases, CEOs viewed short-term volunteers, or individuals who are unable to make a substantial volunteer commitment, as a drain on resources.

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Some CEOs identified ways in which they are responding to new challenges faced by their volunteer programs, including creating more interesting volunteer assignments, allowing individuals to volunteer from their homes when possible, and creating more flexible volunteer hours to increase the supply of student volunteers.

Background on This Research

This project is a continuation of a previous study,² which surveyed 31 hospital sites in Metro Toronto and the surrounding regions of Durham, Peel, and York that each had at least 100 volunteers. However, because two of the hospitals operate more than one site with only one CEO in charge, our sample size for this study was reduced to 29 CEOs. Two hospital CEOs were unable to participate; therefore, this fact sheet reports findings from interviews with 27 CEOs or their designates.

¹ Managers of volunteer resources in hospitals also identified lack of resources to manage additional volunteers as the main reason they could not expand their volunteer programs. See Handy, F., & Srinivasan, N. (2002). Hospital volunteers: An important and changing resource. Canadian Centre of Philanthropy. Available at www.nonprofitscan.ca

² The results of the earlier study are available on-line at www.nonprofitscan.ca.

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