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An innovative approach to understanding emotional intelligence

By Samantha Pender

Two integral pillars of West Park's mission are to deliver exemplary care to every patient, and to ensure that West Park is a great place to be. Yet with staff burnout in health care on the rise across the sector, West Park Healthcare Centre is making it a priority to better understand and strengthen its organizational culture.

Partnering with the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (YCEI), West Park – a leading rehabilitation and complex continuing care hospital in West Toronto with 950-employees and physicians – is conducting a survey administered by Yale in an effort to better support employees and physicians, and ultimately to continue to provide the best care and services possible to patients.

The YCEI is undertaking this important research with five Ontario hospitals, of which West Park is one. This innovative initiative was brought to our attention by The Ontario Hospital Association (OHA). The OHA continues to see challenges in hospitals across the province pertaining to organizational wellness, employee well-being, employee engagement, burnout, stress, fear of reprisal or failure, and dignity of individuals, yet a deeper understanding has remained elusive. Without a sufficiently granular understanding of what is going on within hospital cultures province-wide, it becomes challenging to take meaningful or precise action to improve the situation. The aim is to continuously improve and to ensure an emotionally and psychologically healthy workplace.

In 2019, West Park replaced its bi-annual staff engagement survey with the Yale research survey. It is a more comprehensive survey which is necessary to truly get a read on aspects of our culture. The survey is confidential and results go directly to Yale as a leading independent academic and teaching institution. The Yale team



“I THINK BEING ABLE TO UNDERSTAND EXACTLY WHAT CHALLENGES OUR EMPLOYEES FACE IS CRUCIAL TO OUR ORGANIZATIONAL WELLNESS”

will mine the aggregated data and share de-identified findings that will enable West Park leadership to potentially introduce new policies, programming and plans to improve organizational wellness going forward.

Lee Verweel, Manager, Research & Innovation at West Park, describes the research as an innovative approach to emotional intelligence.

“For our part, we facilitated the research by reviewing the proposed questions with our ethics board and measured the appropriateness of the survey,” he says. “We wanted to evolve the way we survey employees, and looked externally for innovative ways to assess what our employees need for their well-being.”

West Park's human resources department and CEO are all-too aware

of how critical an understanding of emotional intelligence is to creating a healthy workplace and a positive workplace culture.

West Park President and CEO Anne-Marie Malek met with Dr. Zorana Ivcevic Pringle, the lead research scientist, and facilitated a presentation about the research opportunity with senior leadership at the hospital. There was unanimous support for the survey and we look forward to learning about areas we can improve upon, as well as validate areas where we are doing well.

“When I became aware of the YCEI survey, I knew how beneficial it would be to West Park,” Malek says. “As we continuously strive to deliver exemplary care and create a safe and healthy workplace for staff, I knew focusing on

emotional intelligence would help us keep moving in the right direction”

The hospital's leaders are integral to a positive workplace culture. Liliana Catapano, Chief Human Resources Officer at West Park, feels positive this approach will build a stronger foundation of healthy people and practices to support staff wellbeing, organizational health, and positive clinical outcomes.

“What we're able to do with this survey is look at the relevance of emotional intelligence in a healthcare environment, and build leadership capabilities to support an emotionally intelligent workforce” Catapano explains. “We're working to get ahead of the curve and prevent worker burnout, while continuing to maintain and constantly enhance the positive workplace culture.”

With employees being encouraged to participate in the survey by Malek herself, it's clear how eager the hospital is to achieve a representative sample from every level, clinical to administrative.

“I think being able to understand exactly what challenges our employees face is crucial to our organizational wellness,” says Jan Walker, Vice President – Strategy, Innovation, and CIO. “What we'll be able to do with the research will have a great impact and help us develop new policies, practices and ways to work together. We will cultivate an even better workplace and ultimately have an impact on patient care.”

The YCEI's research started with on-site visits to participating hospitals for observation and project scoping, then moved on to research study design, where they had their questions vetted by hospital ethics boards. Data collection and analysis are currently ongoing, with a debrief of findings to be rolled out in the spring.

Once Yale has completed the research analysis, West Park will have the opportunity work on implementing changes that will be meaningful to both staff and patients. ■

Samantha Pender xxx