

# Aurora Health Care: Stewards of Human and Natural Resources

When an organization's mission is focused on promoting health and preventing illness, it's pretty clear that the role of people—as patients, caregivers, and community members—is an important factor in its operations.



Aurora Health Care is a Wisconsin-based not-for-profit healthcare provider and a nationally recognized leader in efforts to improve the quality of care. It is the state's largest private employer with 28,000 caregivers (Aurora recognizes all employees are caregivers). Aurora delivers care at sites in more than 90 communities including 13 hospitals, more than 100 clinics, and more than 120 community pharmacies.

Because it recognizes the personal nature of healthcare services, Aurora is committed to creating environments that meet the diverse physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and economic needs of its patients and clients, as well as the caregivers who serve them.

"Social responsibility is the principle that guides Aurora Health Care's actions as a not-for-profit to improve the health and well-being of the communities we serve," according to Mark Huber, vice president of social responsibility, Aurora Health Care. "Aurora's responsibility to our patients and communities is to be good stewards of resources to assure they are utilized effectively and efficiently."

## Labor Practices Provide Superb Work Culture

A prospective employee visiting the organization's website immediately knows Aurora is dedicated to its caregivers: "We promise to listen

to and implement better ideas, recognize and reward contributions, offer competitive pay and benefits, and continue building a wide range of career opportunities. We pledge to explain business issues and strategies, to anticipate and respond to change, and to provide needed technology and information," according to the Web site. Aurora has been recognized nationally by Modern Healthcare as a best employer. "We believe in the concept of 'responsible freedom,'" Huber explains. "That means caregivers can take independent actions that benefit the patient and the organization. Our culture is more than just freedom from always having to ask permission. It is an obligation accepted by every caregiver to find a better way."

The freedom includes exercising reasonable judgment and being innovative. That means caregivers feel their ideas and actions are valued, they are recognized and rewarded, and they can act on behalf of the patient. In its dedication to continuous improvement, however, the organization stresses that caregivers are also responsible for considering the impact on the safety of the people they serve and their work team, along with financial implications and the effect on quality and operations.

## Wellness program earns recognition

In addition to empowering its caregivers, Aurora is dedicated to employee wellness. It recently was designated as a Gold Well Workplace by the Wellness Council of Wisconsin for its efforts to both improve employee health and reduce healthcare costs. Aurora's initiatives include programs on healthy

Company name: **Aurora Health Care**  
Location: Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
[www.aurorahealthcare.org](http://www.aurorahealthcare.org)  
Founded: 1984  
Scope: Wisconsin  
Employees: 28,000

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eating, weight management, smoking cessation, stress management, physical activity, and medical self-care.

This focus on caregiver education extends to many workplace areas. A 2005 Wall Street Journal article highlighted the organization's program to provide entry-level caregivers advancement through in-house training programs, tuition reimbursement, mentoring programs, leadership development, and part-time employment while completing a degree.

### Green Guide for Healthcare

In addition to sound human resources practices, Aurora believes that being a good steward of the environment is not only beneficial to caregivers—they're living and working in healthier places—but it's good for patients, communities, and the organization.

"We believe that you cannot have healthy communities without clean air, clean water, and healthy soil," according to Kimberly Welch, senior vice president of corporate affairs. "We believe that it is our mission to serve the community by fostering healthy communities, healthy lifestyles, and a healthy environment." Using the "Green Guide for Health Care," Aurora evaluates its efforts with environmental standards designed specifically for hospitals. Many individual facilities also have

launched successful sustainability initiatives, such as:

- Windows have been replaced with new low-emission units, which are energy efficient and provide a better working—and healing—environment.
- Heating/cooling units have been retrofitted with high-efficiency motors, and "energy savings" is a permanent agenda item in department meetings to promote discussion and new ideas.
- Water is conserved by installing rain delay controls on grass irrigation systems.
- Cafeteria carryout containers are made from sugar cane, which is 100-percent biodegradable and 100-percent recyclable, and recycling is encouraged throughout the organization.
- LEED certification is being sought for a new rooftop healing garden at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center.
- A new hospital in Grafton is being designed with LEED standards to make it the greenest hospital in Wisconsin.

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Aurora Health Care®