

# A Truly Healing Patient Experience

*After Elissa had major surgery at Northern Westchester Hospital, it helped a lot that her father could stay overnight in her room. Elissa was also grateful for all the personal attention from her nurses. "Susan helped set up my father's cot and found me the rice pudding I was craving," she recalls. "Angela helped me fix my hair into a ponytail. These small but thoughtful gestures truly made a difference. I felt I was being cared for by family, not strangers."*

Elissa was responding to the patient-centered care practiced at Northern Westchester Hospital. The key role that family plays in recovery, the importance of favorite foods to emotional well-being, and the healing value of personalized care, are elements in this humanizing approach to care. Patient-centered care puts the patient, not the procedure, first. To promote healing, it strives to meet all the patient's needs – not just their medical requirements. By educating the patient, it empowers them to participate in their own care.



Firmly committed to patient-centered care, NWH strives to continually improve the patient's stay by partnering with Planetree, the pioneering non-profit organization whose mission is to personalize and demystify the healthcare experience for patients and their families.

Planetree was founded by a patient. When Angelica Thieriot was hospitalized for a mysterious fever, she knew she was receiving medically first-rate care, but she felt detached, ill-informed, and

insignificant to her own healing process. Unfamiliar nurses hurried in and out of her room. She stared at blank walls for hours. No one seemed aware of her as a person.

Angie soon received another lesson when her son and father-in-law became hospitalized. As a relative, she was relegated to distant waiting areas, uninformed of what was happening to her loved ones. Learning that her experience as a family member was as depersonalizing as her experience as a patient, Angie created Planetree with the mission to put the patient at the center of care.

Northern Westchester Hospital is one of the first five hospitals in the country to be recognized with Planetree's highest honor – Planetree Designation® with Distinction, and the first in New York State. All NWH staff members are well trained in, and dedicated to, putting Planetree's principles of patient-centered care into action. Hospitals from around the world come to NWH to learn this personalized approach to care.

*When Peter started treatment at NWH's Cancer Treatment and Wellness Center, he felt anxious. But the wide range of [integrative] therapies offered by the hospital eased his state of mind. Says Peter, "From the acupuncture and reflexology to the pet therapy and even the drumming sessions, my nerves were calmed in the most nurturing of settings."*

At NWH, patients benefit from holistic healing that touches mind, body and spirit through integrative medicine offerings such as acupuncture, aromatherapy, reflexology, Reiki, guided imagery, music therapy and meditation.

And then there's the great, distinctly non-hospital-like food, customized to each patients' dietary requirements. Patients enjoy meals prepared in a way that celebrates flavors, not flavorings – whole grain breads, soups freshly prepared from scratch and fruits and vegetables from local farms. Patients order what they want, when they want it.

Here, no one stares at blank walls. By choosing artwork and photography from the Aranow Art Cart, patients transform their rooms into warm personal places. All staff members receive cultural competence training, and their sensitive response to patients' cultural differences builds trust. NWH's most recent patient-centered innovation? Bedside tablet computers, designed with input from the Patient Advisory Council, let patients review aspects of their medical record and plan of care in easy-to-understand language, learn about their care team – and even converse with them.

*When Andrew came to NWH for rehabilitation, he received a welcome surprise. "My physical therapist spoke to me as a person, not a patient. I greatly appreciated that."*

NWH has whole-heartedly embraced the Planetree component of family involvement with the creation of the Ken Hamilton Caregivers Center. Specializing in addressing the needs of the family caregiver, the Center provides a physical oasis to replenish and recharge, a dedicated social worker and over 30 volunteer caregiver coaches. Knowing how reassuring family presence is, visiting hours are unrestricted.

*One caregiver recounts, "They were always there for us. We had some very hard times but we could always count on the Center getting us through. Your quiet rooms were so peaceful and helped us take some time for ourselves. The staff and volunteers were so caring, loving, helpful, wonderful and understanding."*

According to Maria Hale, Vice President of Patient Advocacy and Patient Centered Support Services, "The Planetree philosophy helps staff and physicians appreciate the importance of meaningful patient and family interactions to quality outcomes. At NWH, patients and families are active participants in their care, and their unique preferences and values are respected and incorporated in the goals for recovery – this is the essence of Planetree and truly what healthcare is all about."



**NWH** NORTHERN  
WESTCHESTER  
HOSPITAL

400 East Main Street  
Mount Kisco, NY 10549  
914.666.1200 • www.nwhc.net