

A portrait of Robert C. Garrett, a middle-aged man with light brown hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark grey suit jacket, a light blue dress shirt, and a red patterned tie. His arms are crossed. The background is a blurred green foliage.

COVER STORY

State-of-the-Art Medicine, Quality Patient Care

*A Conversation with
HUMC President/CEO
Robert C. Garrett*

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HACKENSACK UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER (HUMC) has been named one of America's 50 Best Hospitals by HealthGrades® for four years in a row. It is the only hospital in New Jersey, New York and New England to accomplish this outstanding recognition. In the following interview with *COMMERCE*, HUMC President and CEO Robert C. Garrett discusses HUMC's state-of-the-art medicine and quality patient care.

Named to the "50 Most Powerful People in Healthcare in New Jersey" list compiled by *NJBIZ*, Garrett was appointed HUMC's president and chief executive in November, after more than 25 years at the facility—most recently as chief operating officer. Since assuming the role, Garrett has begun work on a new Heart and Vascular Hospital at HUMC, a facility dedicated to patients with cardiac and vascular disease focusing on state-of-the-art, time-saving and life-saving care. This project includes a new employment model with community physicians and the recruitment of new cardiac and thoracic surgeons. Other recent accomplishments include a

hospital affiliation with St. Clare's Hospital in Denville, New Jersey, which has strengthened the John Theurer Cancer Center's tertiary referrals, and the establishment of the Touchdown Fund for Kids, Cardiac, and Cancer, a unique partnership with the New York Giants to raise funds for medical center programs.

Garrett is a past secretary/treasurer of the American Diabetes Association and currently serves as Chairman of its Board Development Committee. He has received numerous awards and honors including *Modern Healthcare's* Up and Comers Award in 1996, the Distinguished Citizen Award from the Greater Hackensack Chamber of Commerce in 2001, and the Association of Healthcare Executives Distinguished Service Award in 2004.

He is chairman of the New Jersey Council of Teaching Hospitals' (NJCTH) Board of Trustees. NJCTH is the state's premier teaching hospital network and its institutions represent more than 29,000 healthcare profession-

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Cancer survivors celebrate life, liberty and new beginnings at Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. Cancer survivors and their loved ones boarded the ferries from New Jersey and New York and headed to Ellis Island to celebrate their "freedom from cancer." The John Theurer Cancer Center at Hackensack University Medical Center hosted the event.

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als and 7,100 hospital beds. Its member institutions are dedicated not only to high-quality patient care, but to health professions education and sophisticated research as well.

Garrett received his Master of Health Administration from Washington University in St. Louis and his Bachelor's degree from Binghamton University in New York. He and his wife, Laura, live in Morris Township, New Jersey, with their two sons, Jonathan and David.

COMMERCE: *How did it feel to be named the chief executive officer of Hackensack University Medical Center? There was a nationwide search that considered literally hundreds of leading and prominent healthcare administrators.*

ROBERT C. GARRETT: It felt great! I am both humbled and proud to lead an organization brimming with talent. I have had the absolute honor to spend much of my career at this unbelievable medical center. The dedication and commitment of our physicians, nurses, employees and volunteers is second to none, and I look forward to bringing my vision to fruition. I want to thank the Board of Governors and the entire family of Hackensack University Medical Center for their support and for their confidence in me. With the ongoing support of this motivated, talented team, we will continue to provide an exceptional standard of care, and work to further improve the health and well-being of the people of the New Jersey/New York metropolitan region.

Q. *Having been with HUMC since 1981, you have long been a part of a phenomenal growth story. How will this incredible story continue to be written? What are your immediate goals and priorities?*

A. As healthcare reform is implemented, we recognize we cannot rest on our laurels. We have a lot of work to do. Expanding access to quality healthcare will require new efficiencies and new business models. In order to remain competitive, we must embrace the concept of value-based purchasing for healthcare. Hospitals that provide high-quality healthcare, measured both by patient outcomes and patient satisfaction, are being recognized as high-value facilities. In addition to improving the quality and value of care at individual hospitals, our healthcare delivery system cries out for enhanced integration between and among hospitals. Our recent affiliation with St. Clare's Health System exemplifies this practice. In 2010, we are negotiating more of these collaborations, expanding access for patients and cooperation amongst providers.

Q. *Could you please tell us a bit about plans for the new Heart and Vascular Hospital?*

A. This new facility will be a hospital within a hospital, and will house state-of-the-art equipment and programs which will really set HUMC apart from many heart centers and heart programs. This hospital will be amongst the finest in the nation. It will integrate preven-

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tive, diagnostic and treatment services, with a special focus on cardiovascular disease management and breakthrough research. Inpatients and outpatients will be treated for all types of cardiac and vascular diseases, including heart problems such as blocked arteries and irregular heartbeats, peripheral vascular disease, and neurovascular diseases such as stroke and aneurysm. Housing all these services within one specialized location will allow for more efficient, effective patient care. We will further enhance our leadership position in both patient quality and patient satisfaction. With the investment in these facilities and the continuing support of the medical and nursing staffs, this facility will provide tremendous benefits to the community and our most important ally—the patient. The goal is to achieve integrated clinical services between the hospital and the community, but also transform the way in which hospitals and physicians combine their talents to bring new solutions to cardiac and vascular diseases. The facility is expected to open in early 2011.

Q. *Could you also tell us about the plans for the John Theurer Cancer Center?*

A. I am pleased to announce that the new John Theurer Cancer Center will be open and operational by the end of this year. The development of the John Theurer Cancer Center marks a new leap forward for our renowned cancer treatment program—already ranked as one of the top 10 largest cancer centers in the nation. The center is focused on both care and research, running more than 100 clinical trials annually in treating every form of the disease.

Over the years, Cancer Center Chairman and Administrative Executive Director Dr. Andrew Pecora built an outstanding team of experts in every area of cancer research and treatment. These are “destination” doctors: the kind of men and women who attract patients from all over the country and the world. But as our patient volume and services have grown, they have become separated from one another, working at various locations throughout the campus. It was time to bring this elite team of physicians, nurses and support staff together in a new, state-of-the-art building specifically designed to enhance cancer care and research. The John Theurer Cancer Center will be able to offer even more to people throughout the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area and beyond.

I’m proud of what we have already accomplished, but even more excited about the future of the John Theurer Cancer Center. For example, when it comes to advancing the care and treatment of cancer patients, getting them into clinical trials is of paramount importance. Nationwide, only 10 percent of the cancer patients eligible for trials are actually participating in one. In the better hospitals, that percentage rises to 20 percent or

30 percent. I’m proud to say that here at HUMC, 60 percent of our eligible patients are in clinical trials, and that can make all the difference to a patient with complex conditions, even those with cancers others might consider untreatable. Our new facility will help us accomplish even more, and give every cancer patient what they need most—hope.

Q. *In thinking about HUMC’s willingness to be bold and to take risks to enhance the delivery of medical services, could you please give us a status report on the reopening of Pascack Valley Hospital?*

A. In 2008, HUMC looked beyond its own backyard and answered a community’s call for help. When one local hospital closed its doors due to bankruptcy, it left the region’s residents feeling scared and vulnerable. HUMC wanted to help and it has been making a significant difference in northeast Bergen County.

Our Satellite Emergency Department has been an integral part of the community. It is a true success story. We have treated nearly 20,000 patients with a 99 percent patient satisfaction rate, per Press Ganey data. It doesn’t get any better than that. We look forward to completing the picture with a full-service 128-bed community hospital soon. The residents of this region overwhelmingly voted yes to this project and we want to make sure their voices are heard.

Not only will this hospital provide immediate access to quality healthcare, it will provide good paying perma-

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In 2008, HUMC looked beyond its own backyard and answered a call for help. Since that time, the Satellite Emergency Department at Hackensack University Medical Center North at Pascack Valley has treated nearly 20,000 patients. HUMC remains committed to opening a full-service, 128-bed community hospital.



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ment jobs, short-term construction jobs, and a permanent stimulus to the local economy. In addition to emergency services, HUMC North at Pascack Valley currently provides several outpatient services including diagnostics, laboratory and others—making it easier to access care for the areas' residents.

Q. *Many of our readers are New York Giants fans. Could you tell us about the unique Touchdown Fund: Score for Kids, Cardiac and Cancer?*

A. Hackensack University Medical Center and the New York Giants football team have literally “teamed up” to form the Touchdown Fund: Score for Kids, Cardiac and Cancer. This exclusive charitable partnership, a first of its



Unlike other hospitals—where emergency care is provided within an adult ER—the Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital is home to its own Pediatric Emergency Room with full-time pediatricians on staff 24/7.

kind for the New York Giants, raises funds for the Hackensack University Medical Center Foundation. The Touchdown Fund officially “kicked off” with an on-field announcement at Giants Stadium on Sunday, Oct. 11, 2009.

By becoming a part of the Touchdown Fund, contributors will have the satisfaction of knowing that their donations contribute to one of the nation's most comprehensive and progressive medical centers, while also gaining unique access to the New York Giants. Fund members will be closer to the Giants than ever before, enjoying VIP admission to Giants Training Camp, attending Giants road games and special events, and being recognized annually at a Giants home game. Members of the Touchdown Fund will also receive permanent recognition at the TIMEX Performance Center, the official day-to-day home of the Giants.

This charitable partnership of two champions, HUMC

and the New York Giants, is truly a “win-win” for all. We are also extremely proud that, because of this association, HUMC, one of the busiest hospitals in the United States, can now be called the “Hometown Hospital of the New York Giants.”

Q. *Hackensack University Medical Center has been a longstanding member of the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey, as well as many other regional community and business service organizations. Could you comment on the value to the Medical Center of maintaining these relationships with neighboring businesses and with community-based organizations?*

A. At Hackensack University Medical Center, we know our mission extends far beyond our walls and into the community. One of our top priorities is to be a good neighbor. Why is maintaining these relationships so important to us? Because we are all part of one larger community—one dedicated to progressing even further in our missions of healthcare, community service, and research. The future of healthcare delivery will be defined by partnerships between providers, such as HUMC and the business community represented by organizations such as the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey. Our partnership will position both the medical center and the business community favorably for healthcare reform.

Q. *How is HUMC positioned as far as staying at the forefront of medical research?*

A. The David and Alice Jurist Institute for Research houses basic and translational research scientists and the administrative offices of the Research Department. HUMC is New Jersey's top independent hospital recipient of National Institutes of Health (NIH) research funds. It is nationally ranked 49th out of 119 independent hospitals that received NIH funding for research during 2008-2009. Currently, its physicians participate in 14 NIH clinical trials and more than 450 biomedical industry-sponsored clinical trials.

A decade ago, we celebrated the opening of a world-class research facility. Today, inside the David Joseph Jurist Research Center for Tomorrow's Children—housed in the David and Alice Jurist Institute for Research—our scientists are actively engaged in the greatest advances in the history of medicine. These innovative discoveries and medical breakthroughs are made possible through the generous support of the Tomorrow's Children's Fund, an organization that has been a major supporter of HUMC for more than 20 years.

Q. *Women's healthcare is a growing niche. Where does HUMC rank in caring for women patients with gender-related medical problems?*

A. Women's care at HUMC is among the top five percent in the nation, according to an independent study of patient outcomes released today by HealthGrades®, the leading independent healthcare ratings organization. The study evaluated 16 different treatments for women, including cardiovascular, and bone and joint health treatments and procedures over the years 2006, 2007 and 2008 using data from the federal Medicare program. This is the fifth consecutive year HUMC has been ranked in the top 10 percent of hospitals or better for women's health, according to HealthGrades®.

Achieving outstanding integrated clinical services for women is a testament to the outstanding physicians, nurses and healthcare team members who combine their talents to bring new solutions to the delivery of women's healthcare. Of the 5,000 hospitals that met minimum volume thresholds and other criteria, HUMC and 165 other hospitals were identified as top performers, receiving the 2010/2011 HealthGrades® Women's Health Excellence Award. Participation in the study was not voluntary; all 5,000 of the nation's nonfederal hospitals were evaluated by HealthGrades® as part of the *HealthGrades Seventh Annual Women's Health in American Hospitals* study.

Q. *Being a "green" hospital has HUMC on the right track for the future. Why do you feel this is important?*

A. Hackensack University Medical Center strives to set a national standard for environmentally sound hospitals because it is the right thing to do. As a national leader in healthcare and disease prevention, we recognize and embrace the importance of environmental design in creating a total healing environment, from the air handling system to the pillowcases.

HUMC is one of the greenest hospitals in the country. In fact, the Sarkis and Siran Gabrellian Women's and Children's Pavilion was named one of America's Top 10 Green Hospitals by the *Green Guide*. HUMC avoids using harmful chemicals wherever possible; its flooring and wall coverings are PVC-free; cabinets are made with wheat board instead of formaldehyde-laden particleboard; and the flooring is made of rubber instead of vinyl. In fact, even the cleaning products are green—the medical center avoids toxic cleansers to the greatest extent possible by using Greening the Cleaning® products.

The leader of our "green" hospital initiatives, Deirdre Imus, has done a terrific job as founder and president of the award-winning Deirdre Imus Environmental Center for Pediatric Oncology®, part of HUMC. She helped HUMC develop a Greening the Cleaning® program in 2001, and since then has helped hundreds of healthcare facilities, government authorities, businesses and schools do the same.

Q. *9/11 is one of those events you can't ever forget. How is HUMC preparing for the influx of patients should there be another terrorist attack or a natural disaster?*

A. HUMC recently demonstrated its new disaster response medical capability, the Mobile Rapid Response Program (MRRP), in a large-scale training exercise on the grounds of the Bergen County Police and Fire Academy in Mahwah. Comprised of two emergency trauma units also known as Mobile Acute Care Hospitals and four support vehicles, the MRRP is being hailed as a breakthrough in medicine and cutting-edge technology and can be ready to respond to the scene of an emergency within a few hours.

Able to maneuver through congested areas, response to major mass casualty incidents by the MMRP can assist local, regional and national disaster response efforts. HUMC is the designated host hospital for the Northern New Jersey Urban Area Security Initiative Mobile Emergency Department Program. In the event of a disaster, we want to be able to reach people and begin life-saving measures with advanced medical care as quickly as possible, even at alternate sites of care.

Q. *HUMC was quick to send help to Haiti after the devastating earthquake, so man-made disasters are also something you're prepared for.*

A. In response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti, HUMC immediately sent a medical delegation that worked with the mission organization NOVA Hope for Haiti. Our team—which worked in a tent hospital with a group from the University of Miami Medical Center called Medishare—included one ETD physician and three ETD nurses. One of our anesthesiologists went to help, too. Dr. Manny Alvarez, M.D., chairman of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, also went to work with government officials and provide medical direction. Along with the delegation, the medical center provided supplies and medication including central lines, IVs, syringes, orthopedic screws, sutures, gauze and bandages. They worked in incredibly difficult conditions and often went without food or sleep. They made a huge difference, and I can't thank them enough for their heroism and commitment.

Q. *Caring about people is clearly more than a business for HUMC. Why do your doctors, nurses, administrators and other staff do what they do?*

A. A hospital is a small city. No matter what the need, our people don't have to ask "why" or "if" they can help the people that come to us for care. We can only reach out a hand and say, "of course, we're family." We are part of the community and proud of it. ■