Local resident leading rebranded county hospital

BY MICHAEL OLOHAN
OF NORTHERN VALLEY PRESS

NORTHVALE

Less than six months after taking over the former Bergen Regional Medical Center in Paramus—now named New Bridge Medical Center—the new chief executive officer told about 200 Bergen County business leaders March 23 that she is working to “rebrand” and change the image of the former Bergen Pines Hospital.

“It’s a whole new branding thing for us. The only way to get the rebranding recognized is by things, venues like this,” said Deborah Visconi, a Northvale resident, answering questions following a presentation to business and community leaders at a “Fifth Friday” luncheon, a community networking event coordinated by Bergen Volunteer Center. The event was held at Stony Hill Inn in Hackensack.

Visconi, a 24-year resident of Northvale, was appointed in early July 2017 to lead the newly selected management partnership called Care Plus Bergen composed of Care Plus NJ and Integrity House, an addiction treatment provider, to run the former Bergen Regional Medical Center.

Its prior manager, BRMC, LP, was accused of cutting staff, and dozens of incidents of alleged assaults on patients, as well as OSHA safety violations. The county contract with Care Plus Bergen is for 19 years. Previously, Visconi served seven years as director of operations for Morristown Medical Center, part of Atlantic Health System, and prior she worked for Mount Sinai Beth Israel, formerly Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City, in various roles over 19-plus years.

Visconi serves as vice president and board member of Northvale’s Board of Health. She has a Master of Science in health care administration from New School for Social Research in New York.

‘The personal touch’

“I have been going out personally and meeting with various community groups to educate people about what New Bridge Medical Center is and why we’re different and we need them and why we have a different approach to the delivery of care. It’s all about branding and it’s all about personal touch. I have to be honest it’s all about the personal touch,” she said.

“I think it’s really important for us to get the word out and to let people know it’s part of our stigma-free effort in this county. I do think it’s a part of all of our jobs to spread the word,” said Lynne Algrant, executive director, Bergen Volunteer Center, speaking to attendees.

Visconi said she recently spoke to the Bergen County Police Chiefs’ Association. “It really is about a personal touch and reaching out to the community,” she stressed.

“We are the largest hospital in the State of New Jersey; every time I make it makes me kind of a little nervous to think that, 1,070 beds...we are the fourth largest public hospital in the country,” said Visconi, who characterized the medical center as a “safety net” hospital.

“Our vision is to ensure access to all the residents of Bergen County,” she said. She said the hospital offers long-term care, acute care, behavioral health, and addiction treatment services.

200,000 ‘underserved’

She said 200,000 people in Bergen County are considered “underserved”—those who have Medicaid or are uninsured.

“Our role is so important and so prominent because we have to serve those communities,” she noted.

New Bridge Medical Center employs 2,100 people, represented by seven unions, she said. Of 1,070 hospital beds, 574 are long-term care; 323 are behavioral health; 170 are acute care, and emergency care beds.

She said New Bridge had 13,000 emergency room visits in 2017 and its emergency room consists of 18 beds.

“Our staff are heroes and the way that they take care of these patients is really something,” she said, noting 35 percent of ER patients were behavioral health related.

Behavioral health includes all mental health, substance abuse and addiction services for children, teens, and adults.

Access for all

Visconi said the medical center has 175 providers and is “actively working” to recruit more providers.

“The array of services that the medical center provides is really phenomenal. We are a full-service medical center,” she said.

Visconi said the center is increasing its number of providers in the community to help reduce long wait times and “meet the needs of our communities.”

Behavioral health

She said behavioral health is “one of our key service lines” and she listed all services provided including psychiatric care, mental health and substance abuse assessment, acute psychiatric care, residential programs, inpatient detoxification, adult and geriatric psychiatric services, child/adolescent, and outpatient programming.

Visconi highlighted the center’s 32-slot psychiatric residency program.

“We train our future providers of care,” she said, noting the center’s training programs and residency programs “are really a jewel.”

She said addiction services are offered in partnership with Integrity House, and the center is a partner of the county’s Operation Helping Hand rehab efforts.

Started under former prosecutor Gurbir Grewal, the county program helps get individuals arrested for heroin possession by the Bergen County Prosecutor’s Office into a detoxification program at New Bridge following their arrest.

“We are the first hospital designated stigma-free,” she said to applause. She said the designation will be celebrated by the hospital this spring.

Visconi said the “unique structure of partnerships” with CarePlus NJ, Integrity House, Rutgers Medical School and Bergen County makes New Bridge different from the former Bergen Regional Medical Center. In addition, Visconi said community partnerships with 40,000 veterans in Bergen County, engagement with its communities and providers, addiction services that provide services and act as a community educational resource, and reducing the numbers of patients leaving against medical advice added to the unique structure.

She said integrated primary care is unique to its behavioral health care services, discharge planning process, community collaborations, increasing medical providers, use of technology to access medical records, improving patient experience, and access to payers and residents.

‘A lot going on’

“There is a lot going on. There is a lot of activity and excitement going on. Now we stand shoulder to shoulder with our colleagues in Bergen County,” Visconi said, adding that the medical center works “collaboratively” with Bergen County’s four other hospitals.

She cited working with veterans as one of the center’s highlights, including a job fair that New Bridge hosted for veterans with hiring managers on site.

“At the end of the day, one of the veterans came up and said ‘at the New Bridge Medical Center, you’re putting actions to words,’” noted Visconi.

Visconi said other diagnostic medical services are close at hand for veterans due to the center’s collaboration with New Jersey veterans.

A brochure, “New Bridge Medical Center – Connecting Compassionate Care to Our Communities” was distributed to attendees and detailed additional medical services offered.

These include: the Access Center for mental health and addiction service referrals, long-term care and specialty services, respite care, acute and ambulatory care services, acute rehabilitation services, critical and emergency care, imaging services, surgical suites and same day surgery, outpatient chemotherapy and an infusion center.

Formerly named Bergen Pines Hospital, then Bergen Regional Medical Center, and now New Bridge Medical Center, the facility was originally founded in 1916 to treat patients with contagious diseases.

Upcoming meet-and-greet events are being planned at New Bridge Medical Center to get the word out about the facility and its new offerings. For information, phone community affairs at (201) 225-7141 or visit NewBridgeHealth.org.