

# a global community

The U.S. has become one of the world's most multicultural societies. According to the Hudson Institute's landmark Workforce 2000 report, by the year 2000 roughly 85 percent of new entrants into the nation's workforce will be women, immigrants and persons of color.<sup>3</sup>

This shift in the labor market reflects a general change in national demographics. One in every four Americans is Asian, Black or Hispanic, and the percentage is increasing. This means that customers will be as diverse, if not more, than the employees who serve them.

How does this influence business? Ask Larry Vines, general manager for a Sears store in a mostly Hispanic section of Los Angeles, and he'll tell you how diversity can impact the bottom line. The store, opened in 1927, was on the verge of closing because of dismal sales. Mr. Vines realized that the store's products were not satisfying the tastes of its customers, Mexican-Americans, who had become the primary patrons in the area. After a little research, he restocked the shelves: tortilla presses instead of bread makers, one-piece instead of two-piece bathing suits, and black and white instead of patterned garments. He also introduced multilingual signage and new advertising. The result? Mr. Vines doubled sales in one year, making the store one of the most profitable in the region.<sup>4</sup> As this

example illustrates, it wasn't only right to fulfill the consumer needs of this community - it was also good business.

The question facing Harvard Pilgrim Health Care (HPHC) was whether health care services could also be tailored to become more responsive to its diverse customers' needs. Lisa, a 32-year-old software developer who has been a member of HPHC for two years, speaks frankly about her needs as a lesbian patient. She had changed physicians several times because she felt they were insensitive about her relationship with her partner and the couple's desire to have a child through alternative insemination. But an HPHC directory that was developed to include physicians with an expressed interest in gay and lesbian health issues helped Lisa find a physician who was right for her. Now, she's very satisfied with her health care.



According to 1990 census data, 14% of the U.S. population speak a language other than English at home.<sup>2</sup> Services and products are being tailored to their needs.

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In 1996 there were 24.6 million people living in the U.S. who were born in another country.<sup>6</sup> Communities have developed that reflect their cultural norms.

Boston, one of the major markets served by HPHC, has the third largest gay and lesbian population in the country.<sup>5</sup> So just as Mr. Vines is catering to the prominent cultural group patronizing his store, HPHC is developing services, like the gay/lesbian directory, to better meet the needs of its diverse community.

To meet the cultural expectations of consumers is not always an easy task. While Mr. Vines was able to easily identify the changes that were necessary — stocking shelves with different products, for example — that task can be more complex in the health care industry. Despite the difficulty, it's clear that businesses in all industries must meet a certain level of cultural competence to satisfy diverse and global customers.

Realizing this, four years ago HPHC began strategically assembling a staff that would better reflect its

communities. In addition, the organization began striving to improve its skills in providing services that would satisfy the cultural needs of customers who may not have been attracted to HPHC in the past. The organization's goal is to offer culturally competent products and services that will continue to attract and retain mainstream and underserved cultural groups.

As HPHC moves into its fifth year of a large-scale diversity initiative, the organization is in the process of transformation. Each step has brought numerous lessons and unanticipated challenges, all of which have better prepared the organization to serve its diverse customers.

This report will share some of these lessons, from HPHC's initial efforts to increase the diversity of its staff to its current cultural competence strategies.

" Making life better is our life's work "

There are enough people in the world who don't understand what it's like to be gay or lesbian.

Your doctor shouldn't be one of them.

"

*What if your doctor is not comfortable talking to you about anything — including your sexuality. What if only at the Harvard Pilgrim Health Centers we can refer you to doctors practicing in our centers who are culturally sensitive to the needs of gay and lesbian. Caring, compassionate doctors who are not just easy to talk to, but are also great clinicians.*

*And once you find a primary care physician you feel comfortable with, he or she will work with you closely to coordinate all your health care needs. Including referrals to specialists both you and your doctor respect and trust.*

*We also make health care convenient. In fact, when you stop by to see your doctor you'll find there's no need to go anywhere else. That's because each health center has, near everything you need all under one roof. Like a lab, pharmacy and a new service.*

*Plus many locations offer weekend and extended hours. And, of course, no matter what time of day, you have access to 24-hour emergency care.*

*What's more, we're never far away. We have centers in and around the Boston area including Kennesaw, Cambridge and Somerville. And as a member you have access to medical care at all 14 centers no matter as which see your primary care physician practice.*

*So learn more about our physicians and find how you can get care that's responsive to your needs. Please call (800) 238-4247.*

THE HEALTH CENTERS OF

**HPHC ad directed to the gay/lesbian community. To serve this community, a directory of clinicians who identify themselves as being knowledgeable and perceptive to the health needs of gay and lesbian patients is made available.**