

Department Spotlight: Communications: The Hub of South Nassau



Standing, from left, operators Nancy Wroblewski, Martha Beltre and Grace Gray; technician Griffin Dickerman; Joan Kenny, information clerk; Sharon Smith, supervisor; Jennifer Duffield, operator; and Colleen Wohleking, operator. Seated, from left, Lea DeMaille, manager; Donna Pfaff, information clerk; Mary Lou Vanderhoof, information clerk; and Cassandra Sylvain, operator. Missing from photo: operators Jenny Yanantuono, Uchenna Akazi and Marie Rocker and information desk clerks Annette Mataragus and Dorothy Sharer.

The switchboard: it's the hub of the hospital's communications system. Each year nearly 1 million calls pour into the phone system's epicenter.

Manned by three operators between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m., the switchboard fields the highest volume of calls, about 140 every 30 minutes, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. And from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m., one call is phoned in at least every 30 seconds. During off-peak calling periods, one operator is stationed at the switchboard from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m.

Gone are the days when operators answer a telephone by picking up the handset. Using a computer interface, operators answer calls in a key stroke. After they have identified the name of the individual or department, they transfer the call by pressing the enter key and the computer rings the extension, said Lea Demaille, manager of communications.

The only phones they answer in the traditional way are the separate phone lines that ring at the switchboard when personnel report a fire, a trauma in the emergency department or other medical emergency. Then operators summon trained personnel on the overhead public address system and via the in-house paging system.

Callers pepper the operators with an array of questions, from requesting the date and location of health lectures to where to call to schedule an outpatient diagnostic test and when visiting hours begin or end.

Another vital component of the communications department is the patient information desk in the lobby, which is manned by five employees and as many as 12 volunteers from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. 364 days a year, excluding Christmas Day. Calls coming into patient information after 9 p.m. are routed to the switchboard.

But these are not the department's only responsibilities. Communications provides phone maintenance and service to the hospital and its offsite locations in the form of upgrades, repairs and replacements. In addition, the department supports an in-house paging system that sends out some 600,000

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A FIXTURE AT THE SWITCHBOARD

You've seen her. Seated by the Switchboard window sporting a headset, operator Jenny Yanantuono has been fielding calls for four days a week at South Nassau Hospital for the past two decades.



Jenny Yanantuono at her post.

"This job keeps me going," said the Baldwin resident who is a member of the South Nassau Auxiliary. "I love my work, and I love the people."

When the active grandmother of six and great-grandmother of three is not answering the phone at South Nassau, she is volunteering her time at the American Legion in Baldwin and enjoys dining out with friends.