

Physicians: A Key Factor in the Service Equation

A service excellence strategy won't work without the cooperation of physicians, but they may be slow to buy in. Creating an atmosphere that leaves no doubt that patient satisfaction AND physician satisfaction are important to the organization, and recognizing and rewarding exceptional service, will bring them around.

Spread the Word

"When an organization begins to concentrate on something, everyone begins to take it seriously," says Michael Greeley, Vice President of Operations, Lexington Medical Center, West Columbia, SC. "Keep patient satisfaction front and center by posting scores and customer service reminders on walls in plain view of physicians and employees and emailing organization-wide messages on a regular basis." Distribute or post a new message every week, and make it emotional. "Everyone gravitates to typewritten comments from patients about their experience with an employee or physician," Greeley adds. "People don't always understand numbers and percentiles, but they do understand emotions, and they respond to them."

Customer service also should be on the agenda at every medical staff leadership and departmental meeting. "Share patient evaluations with physicians and acknowledge good performers," notes Hugh Greeley, Founder, The Greeley Company, Marblehead, MA. "Sharing a report each quarter that displays data on various measures for all physicians creates awareness about patient perceptions and physician performance and sparks discussion about how to improve. Acknowledging and rewarding good

performers puts some teeth into the organization's commitment to satisfaction."

Help Physicians Do Better

Providing physicians with patient satisfaction results also calls attention to problems that physicians may not be aware of. "Physicians tend to assume that everyone—patients and employees alike—loves them," observes Jay Kaplan, MD, Medical Director, Studer Group, Gulf Breeze, FL, and Director of Service Excellence, California Emergency Physicians Medical Group, Emeryville, CA. "In reality, physicians' perceptions of their actions may be completely different

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than those of their patients and the staff with whom they work."

Feedback from patients, and also from employees, about a physician's attitude and behavior can be a real eye opener. But it's important to stress that the feedback should not be considered judgment or criticism, but something to learn from. "Our first reaction is often to deny we did anything less than stellar, because we take any critique as indicating we did something wrong. Physicians may try to fall back on excuses like 'It's not my fault,' 'My patients are different,' or 'I'm already overwhelmed—you can't ask me to do something else,'" Kaplan says. "Don't let them. Patient and employee satisfaction are learned skills—offer physicians opportunities

for mentoring and for training in communication and teamwork. But more importantly, demonstrate, at a very high level, that the organization is committed to making the physician's job easier."

Start by creating a physician satisfaction team charged with measuring and improving medical staff satisfaction with the hospital. "Gather input on whether physicians are satisfied with nursing care, communication, equipment, medical records, scheduling, and efficiency," recommends Kaplan. Then address problems and inefficiencies. "Often, solutions are quite simple," Kaplan adds. "For example, some common

complaints are that lab and imaging results aren't on charts when doctors round, or that doctors can't find the chart, or the patient. Those problems can easily be addressed by setting a goal and taking specific action steps to ensure that results are on the patient chart early in the morning, setting a policy that charts must only be in certain places, and creating the concept of a patient locator log to document where a patient is going and the expected return time when a patient leaves the inpatient unit."

Physician satisfaction with the hospital should be a regular agenda item at senior management, medical executive committee, and general medical staff meetings. "It's also a good idea to have a member of the

physician satisfaction team round with key physicians,” Kaplan notes. “That way, management can see firsthand what a doctor’s experience with the hospital is like, and can identify ways to make it better.”

Recognize and Reward

Finally, show that physician efforts to improve service are appreciated. Recognition can take many forms, such as a “customer service spotlight” in the hospital newsletter or the local paper highlighting one outstanding physician; certificates, framed and ready to hang, that a physician can proudly display in his or her office waiting room; small gifts such as car wash discount coupons or DVD players; or handwritten notes to thank and compliment a physician for a job well done. “Not enough thanking of physicians and employees is done in hospitals,” says Hugh Greeley. “Yet expressing appreciation for desired behaviors is essential if you want those behaviors to continue.”

Reward and recognition provide an extra boost to what physicians inherently know is the right thing to do. “Physicians are good people. They want patients and the people they work with to be happy, and they want to deliver exceptional care,” concludes Kaplan. “Sometimes they just need a little extra coaching and encouragement to do better. When a hospital demonstrates through its actions and culture that it is truly committed to becoming a better place for patients to receive care, employees to work, and physicians to practice medicine, it will surely win physicians over to the cause.”

Hugh Greeley can be reached at hugh@greeleywi.com.

Michael Greeley can be reached at mdgreeley@lexhealth.org.

Jay Kaplan can be reached at jay@studergroup.com.

Top Ten Tips for Improving Patient Satisfaction with Physicians

1 Scripting works.

It helps establish positive perceptions about the medical staff.

2 Don't assume physicians know "this stuff."

Make sure physicians know what they are being rated on. Post survey questions where doctors will see them, or print them on a business-type card to distribute to each physician. Reinforce positive behaviors with handwritten thank you notes and other acknowledgments.

3 Be the broken record.

At (nearly) every executive committee meeting and quarterly medical staff meeting, make sure SOMEONE is reviewing satisfaction results with physicians.

4 Publicly recognize "top rated" docs.

Recognize the best at a medical staff meeting, then get them together for a photo for the local paper, your hospital newsletter, or both. This gets the attention of the medical staff, and shows your community that some of the best-rated physicians in the country, as rated by your patients, are right there at your hospital.

5 One patient representative can do great things.

A patient representative who visits EVERY new admission every day of the week (Saturday and Sunday are optional) can leverage the reputation of the medical staff AND give some impartial, nonthreatening advice to physicians about what their patients are worried, scared, or angry about.

6 Provide docs with their satisfaction scores.

Share quarterly, or more frequent, reports to let physicians know how they rank relative to other members of the medical staff. Most physicians are hungry to know how they compare with their peers.

7 It's really all about culture.

Make it clear that you're not trying to improve scores...you're trying to improve your CULTURE (which will improve your scores). Focus on the importance and power of relationships—not slogans, buttons, or gimmicks, but long-term strategies that put people first and raise an individual's self-esteem and sense of self-worth.

8 Improve employee morale.

They're all connected—patient satisfaction, employee satisfaction, and physician satisfaction.

9 Ask physicians to help you.

Personally invite a few physicians to serve as a “physician customer service task force.” The group would meet periodically to review overall results for the medical staff and be the physician champions for satisfaction improvement strategies or initiatives.

10 When all else fails, don't blame your physicians.

Physicians are a part of a hospital's overall satisfaction ratings, but not the only part. Low patient satisfaction scores for a hospital can't be blamed on physicians; look elsewhere within the organization for improvements.

Source: Hugh Greeley and Michael Greeley, November 2004.

Healthcare Strategy alert!

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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The Customer Imperative

It's no secret. Satisfied customers are loyal customers—the ones who come back again and again and recommend your services to friends and family.

The problem in healthcare is that many executives haven't yet grasped the full importance of satisfying all customers—internal and external. That needs to change. As consumers take on an ever-greater role in choosing where, when, how, and from whom they will receive care, hospitals and other healthcare providers are faced with the challenge of becoming the provider of choice in the consumer's mind.

More importantly, healthcare executives should want to change, to put the customer first. I was reminded of the importance of this by my yoga teacher and friend, Lisa Hill, who is currently studying in India. In a shop there, she saw the following sign, posted prominently:

A CUSTOMER IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON ON OUR PREMISES. HE IS NOT DEPENDENT ON US, WE ARE DEPENDENT ON HIM. HE IS NOT AN INTERRUPTION IN OUR WORK, HE IS THE PURPOSE OF IT. HE IS NOT AN OUTSIDER ON OUR BUSINESS, HE IS A PART OF IT. WE ARE NOT DOING HIM A FAVOR BY SERVING HIM. HE IS DOING US A FAVOR BY GIVING US AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO. (SIVA)

Are you ready to begin an organizational, and personal, transformation, to put the customer first? Read on for inspiration and practical advice on how to get started.

Judy Neiman, President
Forum for Healthcare Strategists

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Building a Customer-Focused Organization

Customer Satisfaction as a Strategic Imperative

Today's healthcare consumers are more empowered—they have access to more information, are increasingly responsible for their own healthcare costs, and want a greater say in healthcare decisions. Therefore, healthcare organizations need to focus on the consumer and create a more satisfying customer experience. But how? According to experts both within and outside of healthcare, a research-based understanding of what customers want and whether or not your organization is meeting their needs provides a solid foundation from which to build a quality and service improvement strategy.

LISTEN to Your Customers

“To understand what customers want, you must stay connected with

them,” says Ruth Otte, a Bethesda, MD-based strategic advisor to media, publishing, and technology companies. “Find multiple ways to

“Query all customer groups, including patients, physicians, and the community at large, regularly about their perceptions of the organization.”

connect so that you know what's happening in their worlds, what they care about, and what they think about your product. Conduct focus groups and online panels, go out into the community and talk with different customer groups, and survey patients on satisfaction. The goal is to

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