

## *The Patient Experience Post*

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Since the mid-1990s, Baird has helped healthcare organizations nationwide improve the patient experience and enhance organizational culture. Baird's culture assessment and diagnosis include experience mapping, medical mystery shopping, and focus groups to reveal the real customer experiences within your organization. Using your patients' experiences, Baird and her team prescribe critical next steps for improving patient satisfaction and HCAHPS scores.

## Experience Mapping: The moments of truth

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Many healthcare organizations are measuring patient satisfaction in an effort to see themselves from the patient's point of view. While those surveys reveal a wealth of information, they sometimes fall short in defining the gaps between patient expectations and actual experiences.

What, then, is the most effective way to find out what a patient is experiencing at your organization? How about walking a mile in his shoes? A concept called experience mapping helps healthcare organizations understand exactly what a patient faces during countless "moments of truth" in his encounters with the facility. Experience mapping helps organizations understand the mindset behind their patients' actions and expectations. By doing so, healthcare providers can begin bridging the chasm between patient expectations and actual experiences.

Experience mapping also helps practitioners see that the patient experience is actually a continuum of encounters, whereas the provider system is often a series of silos dictated by internal systems and processes. In patients' minds, what happens when they pick up the phone to schedule an appointment is directly related to how they view their encounters with their doctor or with the radiology department. Experience mapping is a very visual way to help providers see where patients encounter obstacles in their care.

When a secret shopper visits an organization, he uses an experience mapping model to accurately reflect the thoughts and feelings of a typical patient. Healthcare experiences are complex and involve many moments of truth, but each one can be mapped in four components. A moment of truth is when the patient decides if you are who you say you are.

### **Action/Need**

Every patient encounter begins with individual need. At this point in the experience mapping process, the customer will take a step to address his or her needs.

For example, a patient with a persistent cough needs to call his doctor's office for an appointment to relieve his symptoms and offer reassurance that the cough is treatable.

### **Expectation**

This is where the patient begins to apply his own emotional and experiential filters to the encounter. In each person's mind is a set of expectations for what should happen at the point when he or she takes action.

For example, once the patient decides to call his doctor's office, he may expect that the phone will be answered, and the person on the other end will be able to answer his questions and schedule the appointment promptly and politely.

Patient expectations are subjective and can vary greatly depending on the patient's age, emotions, and past experiences. For instance, a computer-savvy Gen X or Gen Y patient might expect to schedule an appointment via email, while a slightly older patient might expect a friendly voice on the other end of the phone.

### **Encounter**

This is the moment of truth. The patient becomes aware of what is actually happening when he or she makes contact with the organization and begins to compare the encounter against his expectations.

In this example, when the patient calls the clinic, he is actually dialing into an automated system. After two transfers, he gets a live operator on the phone and is then placed on hold without his permission.

### **Outcome**

The outcome is the "verdict" when a patient compares the actual encounter to his own expectations. Unconsciously, the patient begins to evaluate whether or not there's a disconnect between his expectations and his actual experience. Most patients unconsciously apply a positive or negative outcome to each of these moments of truth within an encounter with an organization. An experience map can show the organization where some of these negative outcomes are occurring and how they affect the patients' experience and his desire to continue contact with the organization.

Experience mapping is valuable, not only for improving patient satisfaction but for improving all customer satisfaction. It can determine if a service is actually ready for market. While working in a medical center one day, I noticed a larger-than-life nurse recruitment banner strung across the cafeteria. The banner was part of a major nurse recruitment campaign. Understanding that you never get a second chance to make a good first impression, I decided to see what kind of experience a job seeker would have in this organization.

I quickly located the Human Resources department, as I expected that I could submit a job application there. Upon finding Human Resources, I explained that I was a registered nurse with 30 years of experience, including critical care, obstetrics, and management. After citing my credentials, I asked for a job application. The Human Resources employee explained that her department doesn't actually take nursing applications and that I would have to apply online or call the nurse recruiter. In this experience, the encounter definitely didn't meet my preconceived expectations. Not being able to submit an application sent a message that this organization was not very eager for nurse applicants. I would have to think that other job seekers might have a similarly confusing experience. In this particular situation, the organization had spent tens of thousands of dollars and had not tested their own systems to assess the customer experience when coming in contact with the traditional hiring arm.

Getting staff involved in mapping the patient experience helps them see each step of the encounter through the customers' eyes. At each point along the

continuum, comparing the expectations against the actual encounter allows the staff to determine if the experience is positive or negative. In virtually every department, the experience mapping process allows staff to be involved in making improvements for the organization and allows them to focus on what changes will have the most impact on improving the customer experience. While an in-depth secret shopping exercise can provide a wealth of experience data, using [our experience mapping tool](#) can help any organization begin to understand these moments of truth from their customers' perspectives.

*Learn more about ways you can ensure that all of your customer interactions, including over-the-phone interactions, support your healthcare organization's brand, as in [Living Your Brand Promise](#), featuring Kent Seltman, co-author of Management Lessons From Mayo Clinic. As the former Director of Marketing at Mayo Clinic, Seltman was charged with managing the brand for this world-renowned organization. During this 90-minute presentation, you'll hear about crucial elements in aligning the brand promise with the patient experience in order to build trust and credibility with customers. For only \$89, you'll receive all this: pre-session worksheets, a session workbook, webinar slides, and an audio CD of the 90-minute webinar, complete with the Q&A session.*

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*Nurse, author, and consultant Kristin Baird, "Healthcare's Customer Service Guru," is the author of *Raising the Bar on Service Excellence: The Health Care Leader's Guide to Putting Passion into Practice* (Golden Lamp Press, 2008), *Reclaiming the Passion: Stories that Celebrate the Essence of Nursing* (Golden Lamp Press, 2004), and *Customer Service In Healthcare: A Grassroots Approach to Creating a Culture of Service Excellence* (Jossey Bass, 2000).*