

The Patient Experience Post

Healthcare's Resource for
Service Excellence
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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.

Moments of Truth Build Moments of Trust:

3 critical areas of focus—people, processes, and place

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Shaping the patient experience is a big part of what we do at Baird Group, and our recent partnership with BerylHealth puts us even more firmly into this space as we work together to provide sustainable solutions for hospitals and health systems interested in improving the patient experience and, ultimately, their CAHPS scores.

The Beryl Institute defines the patient experience as “the sum of all interactions, shaped by an organization’s culture, that influence patient perceptions across the continuum of care.” The keywords here are *interaction, culture, perception, and continuum*.

Within each encounter, there are multiple moments of truth that impact patients’ perceptions of your hospital, leading them to decide whether you can really deliver on who you say you are. Although some of these moments may appear of seemingly “little” importance, the combination (or sum) leads to lasting impressions. What we know from mystery shopping is that culture is what really shapes the experience.

If we can build trust with our patients in every moment of truth, we can positively impact the patient experience. Moments of truth can build or erode trust. Patients have multiple interactions during an inpatient hospital experience, but they only have one experience. How they ultimately define that experience will be very individualized. It comes down to how they perceive the world, their emotional status, and what’s most important to them.

For instance:

- Someone who is very relationship oriented may be impacted most by how they were treated, whether they were paid attention to, and whether they felt comfortable with the people around them.
- Someone who is very process oriented will be focused on the efficiency of the interactions they have.
- Someone who is very focused on their environment will be most concerned with the look and feel of their environment.

Because the patient experience is influenced by so many touch points, and because each individual will respond differently to those touch points, we as healthcare leaders must pay attention to the broad spectrum of care—the continuum of care that encompasses not only clinical but personal and administrative contacts. I’ll use a recent, personal example to illustrate....

I recently had some minor surgery I had been putting off for some time. Before the surgery, I was told that I would receive a call the day before my surgery to find out what my specific schedule would be. A folder of printed documents

indicated that, if I hadn't received a call, I should call a specific number before 7:00 p.m. By 6:30 p.m. the night before the surgery, having received no call, I was becoming understandably nervous. I called the number listed. After being transferred, the call was disconnected. When I called back again, the attendant said, "If we cut you off last time, we'll cut you off this time. Good luck," Nice. Call number three resulted in an unanswered phone; the phone rang about 30 times before I was disconnected. And on it went. It was 9:00 that night when the department manager contacted me to confirm that I was scheduled the next morning and should arrive at 6:00 a.m.

Now, consider how that experience impacted my level of trust in the organization. Fortunately, I had a good relationship with my surgeon and a lot of trust in his competency, but that evening I certainly did not trust other members of his team.

Importantly, while we tend to focus on the "big rocks" in healthcare—the clinical processes and outcomes, which are, of course, critically important—we cannot fail to consider all of the other "little rocks" that impact the overall patient experience. That's why it's so important to drill down into the patient experience. When a patient can't rate your hospital a 9 or 10, you may be scratching your head and wondering what experiences would cause their mediocre response. For this reason, mystery shopping is a great way to get an insider view on the experience. Our observations reveal many of these moments of truth that shape trust and, ultimately, the overall patient experience. Once documented, along with the emotional responses to the situation, you gain a clearer picture of why patients score your organization the way that they do.

In sorting out the patient experience, we find there are three areas of impact during an encounter: people, processes, and place. **People** concerns the various interactions our patients have with us. **Processes** are the steps we take to make the encounter as smooth and seamless as possible. **Place** involves a focus on the environment itself. All three must be aligned and well coordinated to shape the overall experience. One cannot make up for deficiencies in the others. For instance, a beautiful hotel-like lobby with tasteful decorations, live plants, and streaming waterfalls loses its impact if the greeter at the front desk is abrupt or dismissive.

Take a look at your patient experience and ask what kinds of moments of truth you are creating for your patients. Will they lead to moments of trust that ultimately form a positive patient experience?

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).