

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.

Getting Physicians On Board with Service: 5 steps for building buy-in

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

You've completed the staff training for customer service. The managers are fully on board. You've established the standards and clarified everyone's accountability for results. There are action plans in place with measurable results. It's beginning to feel like all the pistons are firing in synch...and then comes the zinger: another person asks the critical question, "So, what about the doctors? When are they going to start living customer service?"

If this question is posed at the very beginning of a culture-shifting service initiative, I recommend that you work first on leadership, processes, and staff development before focusing on the physicians. Only you have laid the groundwork, and you will be able to gain greater headway with the physicians.

The reason for this timing is two-fold. First, as the employer, your organization is more likely to have greater influence over the staff and managers than over the physicians. Second, if the physicians see that the organization is already making strides in doing their part to improve service, they are more likely to get on board.

But, as your service initiative evolves and matures, it is imperative that you involve the physicians. After all, you can't fully optimize the patient experience without this involvement.

5 Elements of Best Practices

Establish Trust

The organizations that have the most engaged physicians are those that work diligently to establish trusting, open relationships. In many cases, that means first listening to their concerns and making sure that you are following through on promises.

Scripps Memorial Hospital in Encinitas, California is a good example of an organization that has made significant strides.

According to Dr. James LaBelle, Medical Director of Quality and Emergency Services for Scripps Encinitas, "There has been a huge shift in our organization since 2001. To summarize the culture, I must say that the administration was struggling, and the medical staff was cynical. It was an environment of 'every man for himself.' The byproduct was a meltdown of practices. The entire environment started to turn when they recruited our new administrator. He immediately focused on partnering with physicians. He made it clear that he wanted to build the best shop for the doctors to work in. He was great at drawing doctors in and helping them to understand what it takes to make hospitals successful and to create a strategy for the future.

"Our medical staff was hungry for an honest, open relationship, so we

embraced it with open arms,” continues LaBelle. “Out of that came a re-energized medical executive committee. We now have a leadership team that advises administration on how the medical staff and hospital can work closer. Above all, the biggest element of change was getting to a place where the hospital leadership and the medical staff had a willingness to listen and trust. I hadn’t experienced this type of transformation.”

Both the hospital leadership as well as the medical staff leaders agree that success is all about hospital and medical staff trusting each other and working together. That trust can’t be just words. It must be deeds in action. Of course, we’re human and make mistakes, but we’ve learned not to play the blame game. We’ve learned to take accountability for our own shortcomings and move on. The leadership of the hospital and medical staff articulate a common vision that resonates with the physicians.

Help Them Crystallize Their Vision

In order to truly engage others, they must be able to envision results in context of their work. Although your organization may have clear, quantifiable goals, such as achieving the 90th percentile or above on patient satisfaction surveys, that doesn’t create a vision. To engage the physicians, engage them in a conversation about what they want various stakeholders to say about their experience with them. Ask, “What do you want your patients to say about their experience with you? What do you want your colleagues to say about what it is like to work with you? What do you want the nurses to say about their experience working with you?” Compiling their responses is a great precursor to a vision statement or physicians’ code for service excellence. I have found that by engaging physicians in this discussion, they will often give responses that are closely aligned with questions found on the patient and employee satisfaction surveys.

Openly Share Data/Information

Physicians respond to empirical evidence. Give them the facts about patient and employee satisfaction, and show them how they can access the most current information. Help them understand which questions are most closely correlated with overall satisfaction and, ultimately, patient loyalty.

Ask for Their Commitment

It’s one thing to discuss problems and data, but, in order to foster change, you must be willing to close the deal by asking for their commitment. One best practice involves physicians signing a code for service excellence. In such cases, physicians have openly committed to upholding the physician standards and working on teams to tackle specific problems.

Recognize and Reinforce Their Contributions

Physicians are human too. So, like the rest of us, they will do more of what is recognized and rewarded. We all like recognition, so once your physicians are involved and making progress, make sure that you offer appropriate kudos. Performance incentives are one way of offering reward for improvement, but don’t underestimate the power of public recognition during meetings or in newsletter articles. Make it a habit to praise them for their work.



Transforming culture. Shaping 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).