

## *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.

## **“To Cure Sometimes, Relieve Often and Care Always”**

*by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA*

Ambroise Paré is credited with these words and while Paré, the uneducated son of a country artisan who became a great surgeon, said them in the 16th century, they still resonate today. In fact, a Google search of the phrase generates 1.3 million hits!

There is much that is beyond our control in the practice of healthcare. The human system is complex. There is only so much, within our power, that we can do when dealing with the human body, disease, illness, and trauma. Much is beyond our control. The one area where we do have tremendous power and control, however, is in the area of caring.

This has been demonstrated recently by the outpouring of compassion to those who have been affected by the disaster in Haiti. Even without the proper tools and medication, even without the many modern conveniences that we take for granted, we can always care.

Often we think of “healthcare” as the practice of medicine, as the “laying on of hands.” But even the myriad of healthcare workers who are outside the clinical arena—the housekeepers, the facility staff, the billing service people, the HR and communication professionals—can provide care for others within the realm of their jobs. We may not be able to cure everyone or even relieve their pain, but we can always show compassion and care regardless of our job description.

Here are a few caring examples from non-caregivers:

- The housekeeper who takes just a few extra seconds to water a thirsty plant sent to cheer the patient
- The maintenance person who knows that a patient is uncomfortable if the bed is not working properly, and takes the initiative to fix it
- The computer specialist who spots a patient looking lost and escorts him to his destination
- Yes, even the billing collection agent who speaks compassionately with a patient or family member to establish financial arrangements

Too often we minimize the importance and the impact of the small gestures that occur throughout the day. We need to understand that, collectively, they can have as great an impact on outcomes as the high-technology, life-saving clinical procedures performed by the most well-educated clinicians.

If we can reinforce a culture of caring within our organizations to the extent that all of our staff members—whether surgeons, nurses, housekeepers, or billing clerks—take steps to deliver care to every patient, in every encounter, every time, we will make a difference.

As healthcare leaders, we need to be actively seeking out those individuals who are, by nature, caring individuals, regardless of their role within our organizations. We need to make a conscious plan for hiring people with more caring attitudes. Then, once in our service, make sure we are rewarding and recognizing them enough to nurture them in their role. On the flip side, if we want a caring, compassionate environment, we cannot tolerate inappropriate behavior regardless of how good a person is technically.

I am passionate about improving the patient experience. It's something I think about every day and something I focus on in my work with healthcare organizations across the country. As I travel around meeting with healthcare organizations, I am most struck not by a lack of caring—healthcare professionals are caring people—but by a lack of awareness of the many, many little things that make a huge difference for the patients we serve.

*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).*