

The Patient Experience Post

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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.

It's Not a Holiday For Everyone

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

In healthcare environments, there's a bit of a yin and yang to the holiday experience. Staff, and even clinicians can be particularly jovial this time of year, which is generally a good thing, but patients who find themselves ill, or hospitalized, over the holidays may not always appreciate that joviality.

Another holiday impact in healthcare can be a shortage of providers as physicians, and others, take time off to vacation and spend time with their families.

The result: an inconsistent brand experience for patients.

Regardless of what the calendar says, it's very important that healthcare organizations remain committed to providing positive patient experiences 24/7/365. That's a mandate for every day of the year, not just on days that aren't holidays.

In healthcare circles, we sometimes jokingly talk about the four different hospitals we maintain—the daytime hospital, the nighttime hospital, the weekend hospital and the holiday hospital. Behind that joking is the acknowledgment that the patient experience varies based on time of year, day of week, and time of day.

That shouldn't be the case! We've grown to accept these variances in healthcare—to think that it's just a normal function of the industry. It's not okay! We need to adhere to our standards of care every day of the year, at all times of the day.

During a recent workshop I was leading, a woman told a story of her experience giving birth one Christmas Eve. Her newborn's arm was broken during delivery—an orthopedist nowhere to be found. She ended up having to wait several days for service. The sentiment among staff was along the lines of: "Well, what can you expect? It's Christmas."

A colleague of mine has a similar story. Her husband was hospitalized a few days before Christmas with what they originally thought was a heart attack, but that turned out to be pericarditis. It took six days, and five nights in the hospital, for them to find that out though, because doctors were in short supply. They were enjoying the holidays. To add insult to injury, there were also some rumblings that they might be on the hook to cover the cost of the prolonged stay because it was considered by insurers as a non-customary stay.

As a nurse, and a champion of the patient experience, it just seems unconscionable to me that anyone would have to wait for care simply because their healthcare need emerged during the holiday season.

Let's all enjoy our holidays, but at the same time ensure that patients receive consistent, high quality care.

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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). The Baird Group provides consulting, mystery shopping, and training services for improving the patient experience. To learn more, please visit <http://baird-group.com> or call 920-563-4684.

