

The Patient Experience Post

Healthcare's Resource for
Service Excellence
February 2018



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.

What About The Doctors?

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Healthcare organizations and their staff members—both clinical and allied health—are going through a wide range of changes these days, both internally and externally. Growing patient expectations, increasing competition, reimbursement based on quality and satisfaction outcomes, and technology advances that ease and create complexity, have led to changes in policies, processes and expectations.

As healthcare organizations co-create the roadmap to introduce new initiatives and communicate new expectations and accountabilities, one question that is frequently asked by staff is: “What about the doctors? Will they be held to the same standards as the rest of us?”

Of course; clearly that must be an expectation. But, how do you get from here, to there? Through these three critical steps:

Build provider buy-in by speaking their language.

Providers speak any and of all these three languages: head, heart and wallet.

Head. Providers are, first and foremost, scientists. They want to know what the research says, and they want to have confidence that, whatever you're asking them to do, is scientifically proven and worth their time. They need to understand the link between the patient experience and outcomes.

To build trust with your physician and provider audience, you need to establish strong relations which will drive compliance, which will boost clinical outcomes.

Heart. The language of the heart gets at the very essence of why most clinicians went into medicine in the first place—because they care about people. They want to do what's right for their patients. Patients, in turn, want to know their providers, and want to know they really care about them as individuals, and as people—not just as patients. Providers generally *do* care, but they may not always be able to convey the caring ways that resonate with patients. There are tools and techniques that can help them do this more effectively. We find that teaching empathy behaviors and empathy statements help providers to grasp both the verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

Wallet. Having a positive impact on the patient experience will have an impact on the bottom line. Patients having a more positive experience contribute to more positive word-of-mouth, 5-star online reviews, and greater patient retention vs. attrition.

Reimbursement, of course, is also on the line. More payers, beyond CMS, are demanding high patient satisfaction scores—and tying those expectations to what they are willing to pay for care.

If you can effectively communicate with your providers by using all these languages—head, heart and wallet—you can better engage them in supporting the efforts and initiatives that will lead to a great patient experience.

Give them the tools they need to make a difference.

Too often, in healthcare, there is a tendency to focus on what we *don't* want to see—poor service, bad outcomes, etc. Most codes of conduct are framed from this standpoint. But what if, instead, we expressed what we *do* want to see—not just in terms of interactions with patients, but also with staff, referring providers and others? Engage the medical staff in crafting standards that become part of the code of conduct. Once these are firmly in place, make sure they have the training they need.

Training should focus on helping providers develop the skills needed to achieve these expectations. This can be done through traditional training, as well as through individualized feedback that might be part of a shadowing, or coaching initiative. This one-on-one feedback should be focused not only on clinical performance but also on the patient experience and interactions with patients and others.

Hold them to the standard.

The first two steps of communicating through the three critical languages and providing the tools necessary to achieve standards are foundational. Once those are in place, the next piece of this process addresses the common staff question of: “What about the doctors? Will they be held accountable too?”

First you need to identify how you will measure accountability. This is likely to be through some combination of survey measures, attendance at training, and participation in shadowing/coaching, etc. The metrics must be aligned with desired outcomes and should provide opportunity for both course correction and celebration! Next, you should determine and communicate, specifically, how you will recognize and celebrate

successes and the consequences for poor performance or non-participation.

Importantly, make sure that you don't establish an "us" vs. "them" mentality. Instead, [strive for a "we" mentality](#)—together we will be more successful.

Providers have a vested interest in delivering exceptional patient care. To do so, they need your support. Speak their language. Give them the tools they need to succeed. Hold them to established standards. Do these things and you will get the engagement you need to serve your patients well.

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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.