

## *The Patient Experience Post*

Reflections from the Field  
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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.

## Understanding Cultural Differences...and Similarities

by Janet Schulz, Senior Vice President - Consulting Division

If you believe, as we do at Baird Group, that it is vital that patients and families feel heard and are treated as partners in their care, then understanding and honoring the needs of different cultures is a key patient experience priority.

Over the years, Baird Group has supported clients in understanding cultural needs. We often use focus groups with patients and family members to gain insights into their experiences and expectations.

From these focus groups, we've learned a few lessons -

- *Many patient & family priorities are universal* - As health care providers, we often think that certain cultures drive different behaviors as patients or families. Frequently, this is not the case. The issues in delivering a great patient experience are often related to compassion and communication. Problems arise most often from break downs in process. ALL patients want their caregivers to spend time with them, listen to them, and offer information and options. ALL families want to know what to expect, what resources there are to support them, and how to prepare with their loved one for discharge. Breakdowns happen if caregivers don't use available tools like interpretation services and translated documents to assure communication occurs when and how it should.
- *Learn cultural norms* - It's vital to support staff in learning the cultural norms of patient populations who use your facility. Respect is foundational in ALL cultures; how respect is demonstrated may vary by culture, however. We've heard stories of staff unintentionally offending family members because they did not know how the enforcement of hospital "policy" would be interpreted by another culture. In one organization, staff told a patient's father his family could not get beverages from a kitchenette area on the unit. Their action was consistent with hospital policy. Their action was NOT consistent with the family's cultural norms. He took the request as demonstrating a lack of hospitality, and sent his own message of hospitality by bringing refreshments TO the team on the unit. Ouch!!!
- *The details matter* - Last fall, I had the opportunity to conduct focus groups with specific ethnic groups on behalf of a hospital. What struck me was that, for the most part, the patients and their family members were satisfied with their clinical care. Dissatisfaction came from other disconnects. A menu they couldn't read. A bathroom that wasn't clean. Lack of communication during wait times. Think about these items. These are not CULTURAL needs, they are HUMAN needs. It's important as patient experience professionals that we do not feed into an excuse that, "we can't meet expectations because of cultural differences." If we



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think about what we would expect, we often have the answer to much of what our patients would expect.

Next time someone at your facility cites cultural needs as a barrier to service, explore the issue more deeply. Model how, with on-line resources, it is possible to quickly learn the nuances of different cultures. Help connect staff to interpreter and other resources available. And, most importantly, reinforce that we're human beings taking care of human beings. The need to demonstrate care and respect is universal.

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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.