

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.

Building Habits that Make a Difference

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."

That's a quote from Aristotle, a Greek philosopher who lived from 384 – 322 BC, but it is as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago. We *are* what we repeatedly do. This thought is particularly relevant in healthcare as we work to ensure consistently exceptional care for our patients.

Tools like G.R.E.A.T* and C.A.R.E.** not only help ensure that we are consistent in our interactions with patients, but they provide easy ways to remember the steps we need to take to ensure effective, patient-centered care. Using them creates habits. Sometimes, though, the organizations we work with get pushback from staff who may feel too confined by what they view as a "too prescriptive" approach.

Without these tools, though, we've found that results are often inconsistent, leaving the patient experience up to chance. We've seen this with our work in hospitals around the country.

In one hospital where worked, we observed sanitizing foam dispensers inside every patient room doorway. The goal was to get every staff member to foam in and foam out to increase infection control. But, at this hospital, it was rare that our Care Partner Observers saw these dispensers being used at all by doctors, nurses, or other staff.

In another facility with the same type of dispensers and the same expectations of staff, we observed consistency among doctors, nurses, and other staff. Everyone was consistent! Why? One of the doctors said she remembered because each time she stepped into the hallway on rounds she'd chant a little marching cadence saying "Foam in...foam out...." This helped her form the habit. That same hospital also asked people to observe their peers and remind them if they missed a hand cleansing step. They got into the habit of signaling one another.

We are what we repeatedly do. Forming habits that have staying power requires a commitment to repeatedly taking some action over time. Make a list of some habits that you have found helpful in your work and think about what has made these habits so helpful, and so repeatable. Then make a list of some habits that you would like to change or develop. How could you take action to make sure that you repeatedly perform these actions?

Yes, tools like G.R.E.A.T. and C.A.R.E. help create positive and lasting habits that generate standardization across the organization. That standardization may, at times, feel a little contrived, or a little prescriptive. But, through our experiences at dozens of hospitals around the country, we've observed that these practices work to improve the patient experience—every time. If you are what you repeatedly do, what's on your list?

*(A communication tool that reminds staff to Greet, Recap, Explain, Ask, and Thank.)

** (A rounding tool that reminds staff to check patient Comfort, Access to essentials, Restroom, and Environment.)

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).*