

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.

It's Not What You Expect, It's What You Inspect!

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

The healthcare industry runs on policies, procedures, and evidence-based protocols gleaned from best practices. And, from a clinical standpoint, those policies, procedures, and protocols generally work pretty well. But, when it comes to non-clinical activities—and, particularly, customer service activities—things often go awry.

Virtually every healthcare organization that we work with has at least some expectations related to customer service. The problem is that many of them don't back up those expectations with consistency, accountability, and action. In fact, I'm becoming increasingly frustrated with all of the jargon that's thrown around about being "patient-centered" when the reality is often quite the opposite.

Some of the behaviors I see indicate that we have a long way to go to be truly patient-centered in many healthcare organizations.

This isn't true at all healthcare organizations, of course. There are some that truly stand out. What I see in those is a concerted focus on making service expectations real through communication, inspection, coaching, accountability, and action.

It's not what you expect, it's what you inspect, that makes a difference.

At the Baird Group, we see this regularly through our mystery shopping activities and, almost without exception, the healthcare leaders we work with are shocked when they discover that their expectations (even those that are carefully communicated in policies, newsletters, and performance evaluation documents) fail to hold up through inspection.

- A staff person at a hospital that clearly expects employees to assist patients who look lost by personally escorting the patient to his or her destination walks right past a patient who is clearly lost.
- A receptionist expected to look up and greet patients immediately at the check-in counter is observed having a personal conversation with another staff member, while a patient stands unattended at the counter.
- Staff members standing outside a hospital door in close proximity to a sign that says "no smoking" as they enjoy their "smoke break."

And, what do their fellow co-workers, clinicians, and even hospital leaders do as they walk past and observe these behaviors. Unfortunately, too often, nothing!

What you permit, you promote.

Having policies, procedures, standards, and protocols in place that outline service expectations is not enough. The information in those documents are nothing unless they are enforced—and reinforced—through the actions of healthcare leaders. Supervisors, managers, and C-suite executives alike, must make it their mission to hold everyone to a consistent standard. But the accountability doesn't stop there. Service expectations need to become so embedded in the culture of your organization that nobody in the organization, from housekeeping and facility services to the executive suite, will tolerate less than exceptional service.

How can you develop such a culture? It can start with your policies, procedures, standards, and protocols. But then, it needs to be beyond these as you back up expectations with inspection, accountability, and action.

Model the **behaviors** you want to see in others:

- Train your staff on the standards with clear competencies
- Make rounds to get feedback from patients about employee performance
- Catch people doing the right thing and let them know you appreciate them
- Coach continuously

An important first step can be conducting an unbiased assessment of your current culture. If you're like many of the healthcare organizations we work with at the Baird Group, you may be surprised by what you discover.

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.

Invite Baird to speak at your next leadership development event! To learn more about the [Baird Model for Service Excellence](#), employee engagement workshops, or to sign up for her FREE newsletter, write to info@baird-group.com.

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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).