

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.

Aligning Promises with Patient Experience: Minding the gap

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Check out any hospital's marketing messages and you're likely to see statements like these:

- "We put patients first"
- "Committed to delivering high-quality care every time"
- "We're here for you"

Sound familiar? While these don't reflect any *real* statements that we know of, they *do* reflect the general tone of many marketing slogans. There is nothing wrong with the sentiments expressed. After all, providing the highest quality care and service to patients should be at the core of everything we do in healthcare.

The only problem is that too often these sentiments don't match reality. It seems like we're often bragging about our great service in healthcare, yet we don't often take the time to seriously evaluate what we're promising compared to what we're delivering. How do you think patients react when they see a billboard slogan promising commitment to excellence and yet review your HCAHPS scores online to find that other patients are rating you anything *but* excellent? I've yet to see even the lowest-scoring hospitals advertise that they're proud to be mediocre.

Identifying what it is you wish to be is just the starting point in delivering a great patient experience. That statement, in fact, represents your vision—or it should. Your vision for excellence should obviously be reflected in all of your marketing and communication materials. But there's more to living your mission and vision than simply telling people what those are.

I like to talk about *minding the gap*: making sure that what you're promising and what you're delivering are aligned. Too often we take it for granted that they are aligned. Rather than take it for granted, there are steps you can take to determine how well you're doing:

- 1) Verify and clarify your mission, vision, and values. Are they an accurate reflection of how you wish to be perceived?
- 2) Review your communication materials. What are you telling your patients and your public? This can literally involve an audit of your communication materials—taglines, slogans, key messages. What are the promises that you're making?
- 3) Evaluate what you're delivering. This is where the rubber meets the road, as they say. Are your actions in alignment with the promises you're making to your patients through your mission statement and

other communication materials? Here's how to find out:

- a. Check in with your employees. How well do they feel your promises are reflecting the reality of the service provided to patients? What, if any, barriers are standing in their way?
 - b. Check in with your patients. You can do this through patient satisfaction surveys, through the monitoring of your HCAHPS, and through one-on-one interactions.
 - c. Seek third-party perspectives. [Mystery shopping](#) can be a great way to gain perspective on your service delivery from a non-biased source. Our experience with mystery shopping has shown us that hospital leaders are frequently surprised at the disconnect between their internal perspectives and perspectives of those "on the outside."
- 4) Keep an open mind. Be open to perspectives from employees, patients and others outside your organization about areas where you might improve. It's natural to want to explain away negative feedback, but that feedback can help you achieve ever-higher levels of performance.
 - 5) Make the quest ongoing. Don't just conduct an assessment once a year or when trouble strikes—keep your assessment ongoing. Every day, in every way, seek input from staff, patients, visitors, and others about how you're doing and what you might do to improve.

I've focused on the potential negative disconnect between promises and reality. For some of you, though, that disconnect may go the other way. You may be *too humble* about the quality of care and service you're providing. And that's a great place to be. But, in either case, it's the alignment that matters.

Mind the gap: take the steps above to determine how closely your words and your actions are aligned.

Baird Group works frequently with hospitals and healthcare systems on the types of assessments described above. [Contact us](#) for more information.

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).

