

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.

Physician Shadowing & Coaching to Improve the Patient Experience

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Physicians clearly have a marked impact on the patient experience. While the vast majority of physicians are highly committed to making the experience an exceptional one, like all of us, they may be unaware of the little things they do—or don't do—during patient encounters that may have a negative impact. They also may not recognize the special things they do that delight the patients with whom they interact.

While nurturing positive patient experiences has always been a top priority for healthcare organizations, HCAHPS has made this commitment more measurable, and more transparent, than ever before. As the Baird Group works with organizations around the country, we find that their interests in making improvements in all patient interactions have never been higher.

We've found that one of the most revealing opportunities to gain insight into the patient experience is through shadowing and coaching the clinicians, including physicians, who interact with patients. This process includes two key elements:

1. A "shadow": an astute observer; someone who can effectively pick up on both the objective and subjective nuances of a physician/patient encounter.
2. A "coach": someone who fosters learning, transformation, and growth.

By combining the elements of shadowing and coaching, the Baird Group helps healthcare organizations identify both the best practices and needed opportunities for improvement.

It's important to note that shadowing is *not* about weeding out "bad" providers or about punishing—it's a tool for goal-setting and personal improvement. Entering into a trusting partnership during this process, where both the shadow/coach and the physician recognize the value of these interactions, is critical. The outcomes of effectively implementing a shadowing and coaching process have both internal and external impacts.

External: Patient engagement

- Improve patient satisfaction and the resulting scores
- Improve patient adherence and outcomes
- Increase patient loyalty

Internal: Physician engagement

- Improve staff relationships
- Improve culture of safety and decrease "never-events"
- Decrease disruptive behaviors
- Decrease malpractice costs

Our philosophy as we work with organizations is analogous to a “train-the-trainer” approach. Instead of providing the coaching services, we teach healthcare organizations how to institute an effective shadowing/coaching program. By giving them the tools, they can provide physicians with feedback on an ongoing basis. But this isn’t a “one and done” activity; it’s an important element in a comprehensive, culture enhancing approach to improving the patient experience. As new physicians are hired, as they move into new roles, or simply as time goes by, it’s important to provide ongoing feedback with an eye toward continual improvement.

As you consider creating a shadow/coaching program, it's important to consider which staff members might be effective in shadowing/coaching roles. An effective shadow/coach is one who can master the following:

- Assume a neutral position
- Be fully present
- Accurately document examples
- Provide objective and tactful feedback
- Assist in setting S.M.A.R.T. goals for improvement
- Model best practices

There are certainly many specific skills required to be effective as a shadow/coach, including the ability to gain providers’ trust, establish rapport, and engage in effective coaching conversations. These are the skills that the Baird Group models and teaches in our 1-½ day workshop. Unlike some approaches to shadowing/coaching, the Baird model prepares non-physician coaches. This model allows the observer to focus solely on the physician interactions with the patient eliminating any judgment about the clinical elements.

It’s endlessly rewarding to see the lightbulb go on as physicians take small steps that reap huge benefits in improving the patient experience. In follow up with a newly minted coach, he told us how, when he told the physician he was shadowing that she has a remarkable ability to engage her patients, she teared up. This was a reminder that positive feedback can be just as valuable as the constructive redirection. This physician pours her heart and soul into her work each day and was immensely grateful for the feedback that her efforts are worthwhile.

In many situations, the providers benefit from simple pointers on how to demonstrate greater empathy or to communicate more effectively. Physicians are often, by nature, somewhat competitive. They don’t want to see their patient satisfaction scores as anything less than stellar. With a little coaching, they’ll not only improve their scores but can become more engaged with the patient as a whole.

To learn more about the Baird Group shadowing/coaching training, contact us at info@baird-group.com or 920-563-4684.



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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.