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.

Reflections from the Field: *"We Have Met the Enemy…"*

By Angela Fieler, MPA, CMQ/OE

We work in an industry where human error can have devastating effects. We spend thousands of hours and millions of dollars changing processes to minimize the possibility of human error wherever possible - except when it comes to customer service. In healthcare, when service is poor, we freely blame the person delivering the service and all too often, look no deeper for a true root cause.

I was recently working with a group of leaders who were distraught by the lack of customer service being delivered on the front lines in their organization. The leaders complained that staff members weren't making eye contact, smiling, or being helpful. The organization's patient survey scores were declining – it was clear to leaders that the problem was the people and that retraining was the answer. As an outside observer, I saw something very different.

This organization has undergone tremendous change over the past two years. Leaders had to make some difficult decisions. Some services were expanded, some were consolidated or relocated, and some were eliminated completely. Managers were responsible for adapting processes to the new reality; some were well equipped to handle this, but others were not. The constant change didn't just affect leaders and managers; it took its toll on employees as well. Policies and procedures that once worked well were suddenly confusing as groups merged or teams were cut. A lack of interoperability between disparate electronic or automated systems became apparent. Relocation created communication, space, and workflow issues. Leaders and managers were implementing frequent changes as they tried to solve the emerging problems.

Working in an environment fraught with these kinds of barriers can hamper even the brightest customer service star. In Coaching for Engagement and Improved Performance, Baird Group speaks of leaders' responsibility to coach, model, mentor, and manage. When you coach, are you asking about and addressing barriers to great customer service? Or, in your quest to put out the next fire, are you creating new barriers rather than managing existing barriers? If your patient experience scores are declining and your staff members seem to be struggling with delivering great service, take some time to assess potential root causes beyond human error. You may find yourself saying, in the words Walt Kelly (creator of the immortal Pogo), "We have met the enemy and he is us." If that is the case, model great internal customer service by managing the barriers to the best of your ability. When you've made some progress there, your team will be ready for some great customer service training.

To learn more about the Baird Model for Service Excellence, employee engagement or leadership development workshops, or to sign up for her FREE newsletter, write to info@baird-group.com.