

The Patient Experience Post

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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.

Walking the Talk: What You Permit, You Promote!

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

Every hospital we've ever worked with has a series of expectations for their staff members related to the customer experience—things like:

- Addressing patients by their preferred name
- Offering hospitality to waiting visitors
- Making eye contact and greeting patients and visitors in hallways and elevators
- Picking up and disposing of any litter or spills, or notifying housekeeping
- Not eating food in patient care areas or when visible to patients

And the list goes on. Your hospital probably also has a list of "service standards" contained in some policy manual or online and used in training employees at orientation and, maybe, during annual in-service.

But, despite the fact that these standards are commonplace, what is also commonplace is the failure to hold employees—including senior level executives—accountable to these standards.

As we evaluate and work with hospital staff to improve the patient experience it's not uncommon for us to observe such things as:

- Hospital staff talking about other staff, patients, and hospital issues in areas where patients and visitors can hear these conversations
- Staff members failing to ask if they can help a patient find their appointment when the patient looks notably "lost"
- Staff members chatting among themselves while patients are waiting to be served, or while the phone is ringing
- Employees walking by garbage that could and should have been picked up and deposited in the trash
- Staff smoking on a smoke-free campus

All of these things happen while leaders walk by without comment.

This list, unfortunately, also goes on. And that's a major problem. Because, you see, creating an exceptional patient experience isn't about writing standards. It's about living those standards. And it starts at the very top of the organization.

If your senior leaders, and we'd include medical staff here, aren't walking the talk, your standards lack credibility and become virtually worthless. What you permit, you promote! If employees see their leaders ignoring the standards, why should they follow them? Further, if they observe leaders allowing others

to ignore the standards, that also sends a powerful message. A message that you really don't care.

That's not the message you should be sending in this era of heightened scrutiny and shared public data on hospitals and health systems. Competition is on the upswing and word of mouth rules. With increasing choice, consumers will more than ever seek care elsewhere if you're not meeting their needs.

Action Steps that Promote Accountability

How can you remedy the situation? Senior leaders can drive a shift when they do two things consistently: 1. Make their expectations clear that leaders at all levels are expected to uphold the standards themselves AND hold everyone accountable. Borrow from the TSA by abiding by the statement, "If you see something; say something." 2. Make regular rounds to model the way, reinforce the positive and identify issues in need of correction. While you don't want to become known as the "white glove" patrol, it's important that you are both visible and observant. Rounding gives you the opportunity to see how middle managers interact and provide feedback. It helps drive greater accountability when everyone knows that you not only expect, but inspect people, processes, and the environment (place) that effect the patient experience.

Look around your facility. Are your leaders walking the talk? Remember: What you permit, you promote.

Phone communication is an essential part of the patient experience and is often the first part of the patient experience. In just seconds, your patients are deciding if you are friendly, knowledgeable, concerned, and willing to help. In fact, research shows that after just a 2-minute phone encounter, patients are clear about whether or not they would return to your organization or recommend it. Patients rely on phone encounters to make appointments and seek clinical advice. Other callers rely on phone encounters to gain vital information about a loved one. In both situations, it's important that you create a positive, trust-building experience. To engage your staff in essential phone skills, look toward the tips and tools in [You'll Have Them at "Hello": Phone skills that will WOW your callers every time](#). For only \$199, you'll receive the following: the video recording, presentation slides, a transcript of the recording, a participant guidebook, a moderator guidebook, a quality assurance tool, and additional handouts! This session is also available as a live training workshop.

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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.