

## *The Patient Experience Post*

Healthcare's Resource for  
Service Excellence  
March 2015



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.

## Who Are Your Customers? If You Don't Know, You May Be Disappointing Them!

by Kristin Baird, RN, BSN, MHA

In healthcare we all have customers to serve. Generally, we tend to automatically consider the patient as our customer and, in most cases, the patient is the ultimate recipient of the services we provide.

But having a singular focus on the patient as the customer can be misguided in some instances. For example:

- From an Environmental Services point-of-view, the patient is the obvious end-user and recipient of the environment they provide, but they have another customer that they serve: nursing staff who can't admit a new patient until a room is clean. Their needs and perspectives are important too.
- From the Pharmacy's point-of-view, the patient is also an important end-user, but pharmacists don't administer or prescribe medications. They must partner with physicians and nurses to serve that ultimate end consumer—the patient.
- IT doesn't play a role in direct patient care but they are vital to the direct care givers and others within the organization.

In a healthcare setting, there are a wide range of support service personnel whose actions impact the patient, but whose direct contacts serve the needs of others within the organization who represent their "true" customer.

Not having a clear idea of who you are actually serving, can lead to missed opportunities and unmet expectations.

As we work with healthcare organizations around the country, we use an interdepartmental survey tool to help our clients engage in meaningful discussion and collaboration across departments. We encourage our clients to engage in meaningful conversations with staff to explore the issues of:

- Who are our customers? What is the specific stakeholder group we serve who relies on what we deliver to aid them in their roles?
- What do our customers need from us to be most effective in serving our mutual end customer—the patient?

- How are we currently staying in touch with the customer to assess and respond to their needs?
- How well are we meeting our customers' needs?

This last point is one that requires some specific evaluation—not just personal assumptions. That's where the survey tool comes into play. It serves as an efficient method for gathering data which serves as the basis for discussion, collaboration, and service improvement plans. The tool becomes a point of reference for leaders as they learn to give and receive feedback in significant ways to enhance the culture and ultimately boost the patient experience.

*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.*

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](mailto: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). 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.