

Five Essential Strategies to Create the Best Patient Experience by Kara M. Bunde-Dunn

At this time in history, when reimbursement funding is increasingly connected to the patient experience, it is no surprise there is tremendous research and numerous data points telling health care organizations what magic button to push to improve today's patient experience. We are inundated by information online, in our inboxes and the latest books hot off the press around the best techniques to improve experiences. With all of the surveys and reports available administrators could get lost in the details.

At this time when we are flooded with information it is important to take a step back and think about what is most meaningful to the overall experience of a patient. The principals of hospitality transcend into the health care industry now more than ever. Whether you have been a patient recently or you have sat bedside with a close friend or family member – we all have a patient experience to share. Impacting patient lives should be at the forefront of your organization's mission. Much like Talent Plus, our clients are at the top of our organization chart. We report to them and are held accountable to their outcomes. As you focus on the outcomes of your patients, we encourage you to follow these simple strategies.

1. Select Hard. Manage EasySM. It truly can be as simple as selecting patient-centered people. Take the time to select the right individuals who have a passion for serving others so you may spend less time coaching individuals who may not possess the natural aptitude to do so. It is much easier to achieve great outcomes when you have the right people who can't help but to be of service to others. Think of someone right now who seems to have a huge heart and a larger than life capacity to make patients feel loved and special. If you were sick or injured and in need of care, what kind of person would you want to take care of you? Some of the attributes that come to mind are

empathetic, caring, thoughtful, kind, helpful, dedicated and patient-centered. According to Jim Collins, in his book "Good to Great," "the 'right person' has more to do with character traits and innate abilities than specific knowledge, background or skills." Take the time to discover what your organization is doing to measure these attributes in your hiring process. Study your most successful caregivers and find out what makes them so incredible. Once you have that information, select more individuals like your very best and hold out for talent.

2. Focus on each patient. Health care organizations are great at collecting all sorts of medical data and information, but how often do you take the time to truly get to know your patients? Find out about a patient's recent success, their family, and the things that make them happy and excited in life. Once you find out about a hobby or special interest, you have the ability to use that information for the betterment of the patient. If a patient loves sunflowers, cut one out of your garden and bring it to their room. Learning what makes each patient unique and special allows you to individualize the care provided to them. Health care organizations need to do more than just treat the medical issues of a patient, they need to find a way to keep patients positive and hopeful in a very difficult time in life.

3. Line it up. Pulling this principle from highly successful hospitality companies and leaders, such as Horst Schulze, founding president of The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company and current president and CEO of Capella Hotel Group; health care organizations can review a small aspect of their mission, vision and values every day in a quick meeting (i.e. Line-up, huddle, FormationSM, etc.) before every shift. The staff can also get together to talk through some of the medical needs of the patients; however, it is equally beneficial to discuss some of the unique and personal information the team has learned

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about their patients. Knowing how to make a patient feel special is good; sharing that information with the rest of the team is even better. Conduct a patient spot light at the start of every shift. Develop a few information points that the staff would be responsible to collect on that patient and share back with the team. This “line-up” would also serve as a way to recognize individuals who have created a “wow” service experience for patients. This activity takes as little as five minutes and it reminds the staff to stay connected to the greater purpose. Many organizations have adopted this concept and named it everything from JumpStart, Formation and Line-Up.

4. Rethink empowerment. Empower your staff to exceed service expectations; those who are closest to the action should be making the decision. Many times in an organization employees want to do more for patients but fear the repercussions of taking ownership. The staff can feel like they need approval to do anything outside of the normal protocol. As a leader it is crucial to encourage and empower employees to do everything possible to “wow” the patient, make them feel special and genuinely cared for, within legal and ethical standards. The best and easiest way to start this process is by rewarding and recognizing individuals who went above and beyond to help a patient feel special. President and CEO of Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital, Gerard van Grinsven, says, “When you come to a hospital you need more genuine care and comfort than any six-star deluxe hotel guest.” Empowering your staff to do whatever they can to exceed the patient experience creates a powerful and necessary sense of ownership. We recommend reading the book “Practically Radical” by William C. Taylor, which is focused on transforming companies and shaking up industries.

5. Round it out. UCLA Health System has had a dramatic increase in the overall patient experience and patient satisfaction scores. One way in which they have achieved this success is by requiring leaders to round patients every day. Even the CEO, Dr. David Feinberg, takes the time to get out of his office to walk around and stop in to talk to patients. He asks them about their stay and learns more about what the UCLA Health System can do to improve their patient experience. He acts on those requests and reports back the results and solutions to the patient. A great leader is never too busy to stay connected to the greater purpose behind his or her organization; to serve the end user. If this concept resonates with you, read a book written about the recent success at UCLA Health System “Prescription for Excellence” by Joseph Michelli. You may also watch footage of Dr. Feinberg speaking about rounding at TEDxUCLA,

(<http://www.uclahealth.org/body.cfm?id=1761>)

Never has there been a better time to improve the overall patient experience. So much money is spent on the health of people in the United States, and so much funding is directly correlated to the experience of the patient. Just like in any industry, patients bring their set of consumer expectations to your organization. Providing actual health care – not sick care, as Gerard van Grinsven would say, is about taking care of the whole person and their family, and providing an extraordinary patient experience is about just that.



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