



THE HUMAN TOUCH

BY DEBRA STEVCO MILLER

HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS ARE REDEFINING THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE

If someone mentioned that their overnight stay was an experience that met all of their expectations by a caring staff from the moment of arrival until their departure, would you think they were referring to a medical facility?

The patient experience is an important part of hospital initiatives, because how the individual felt about the care they received from the medical staff can influence future medical facility choice. Hospitals that exhibit a health care environment focused on compassion, attention and understanding earn high online ratings and recognition.

Tony Reed, MD, is a senior vice president and chief quality, safety and experience officer for Inspira Health, a network with hospitals in Elmer, Mullica Hill, Mannington and Vineland and outpatient sites in five South Jersey counties. He is the senior leader who oversees the patient experience, from point of first contact to post-treatment follow-up.

“We want to engage with every patient in a meaningful way. This means meeting people where they are and embracing change — thinking outside the box, launching innovative programs and staying current with best practices,” he said. “We emphasize people-centered care, which means focusing on the complete well-being of our patients, visitors, staff and providers.”

Last year, his health care network created the Patient Experience Training and Orientation Program to help enhance the communication skills of providers. In December 2023, improved communication placed Inspira Medical Group’s providers in the top 10% overall for patient satisfaction, according to Reed.



Some hospital systems employ Patient Family Advisory Councils, which team up current and former patients, families, and hospital staff to better understand the perspective of patients.

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“We are committed to continuous improvement and are always looking for refinements and new ways to make the experience even better for the next patient,” he said.

As a result, Inspira Health has received the outstanding Patient Experience Award™ from Healthgrades — a company that provides information about physicians, hospitals, and health care providers — for the last three years.

Healthgrades looks at the patient responses from the HCAHPS (Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems) 29-question survey distributed to a random sample of adults after discharge. Specifically, the survey asks respondents to rate hospital care based on whether or not a measured action took place, and if so, how frequently the

At Virtua Health hospitals, engaging the staff is a priority. Colleagues are surveyed, have access to a relaxing Refuel Room on the hospital floor, and participate in a six-month program that emphasizes communications with patients.

Photo courtesy of Virtua Health



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that we hear and see; where we can make changes for improvements. Our patients matter and what they say matters. That’s how we learn, that’s how we grow, that’s how we get better.”

SARAH CRESPO | regional director of Patient Experience, Prime Healthcare



Patient feedback not only helps hospital administrators focus on areas that need improvement but provides insight on the successes.

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patient perceived the action to take place such as timeliness of assistance, pain management, communication with doctors and discharge planning.

Craig W. shared his recent patient experience.

"I've had two separate lengthy hospital stays and three major surgeries over the past five months," he said. "One of the most important issues for me is to see and know that the caregiver team of nurses, physicians and others are communicating and coordinating with each other and are current, up-to-date (by the hour and minute) and understand what I, individually, am experiencing and feeling. I found comfort and confidence in knowing my care team of physicians and nurses were constantly communicating."

Patient feedback not only helps hospital administrators focus on areas that need improvement but provides insight on what the successes are. Some hospitals also text or email a separate custom survey via outside vendors. Both positive and negative comments are regularly shared with colleagues.

Sarah Crespo is the regional director of Patient Experience for Prime Healthcare with hospitals in northern New Jersey including Saint Michael's Medical Center, St. Mary's General Hospital and Saint Clare's Health. She and her team capture real-time feedback from patients, which is shared with staff and providers.

"We want to embrace everything that we hear and see; where we can make changes for improvements," she said. "Our patients matter and what they say matters. That's how we learn, that's how we grow, that's how we get better."

Also, medical staff is acknowledged monthly and appreciation events are held in understanding that the hospital workforce is at the core of the patient experience.

At Virtua Health hospitals in Marlton, Mount Holly, Camden, Voorhees and Willingboro, engaging the staff is a priority as well. Colleagues are surveyed, have access to a relaxing Refuel Room on the hospital floor, and participate in a six-month program that emphasizes communications with patients.

Cardiologist Reginald Blaber, MD, is executive vice president and chief clinical officer for Virtua Health. He knows the importance of a passionate staff and its effect on the patient experience.

"All the data says that if you have an engaged workforce, anything is possible,"



At Saint Clare's Health, the team captures real-time feedback from patients, which is shared with staff and providers.

Photo courtesy of Saint Clare's Health

he said. "I learned long ago in private practice, patients may come to me because of my reputation, but they stay or leave based on their interactions with the rest of my staff because they touch the patient way more times than I do."

He will make suggestions to physicians and nurses on rounds to knock on the patient door, introduce yourself, sit down, look the person in the eye and have a conversation.

"Patients want to know us and they want us to know them and to know their story. When we get to know them (patients) as a person, human-to-human, the patient not only benefits but also the provider," he said.

Some hospital systems employ Patient Family Advisory Councils, which team up current and former patients, families, and hospital staff to better understand the perspective of patients. So, instead of making assumptions of what changes

should be made, outreach to a diverse community helps in decision-making from firsthand feedback bringing patient and clinician views closer together.

Yolanda S. related her husband's month-long hospital and rehab experience.

"The service he received in both facilities was excellent," she said. "From the moment he checked in, recovery, and then the duration of his stay helped his transition to homecare go smoothly. The medical team and administration were very focused on his treatment. They also took the time to update me regularly and would call me with any changes or questions they had."

"What we're focused on in 2024 is recognizing the uniqueness of each person," said Dr. Blaber. "By understanding who they are, we get well beyond trying to figure what is the matter with them, and more focused on what matters most to them. That is one of the keys to changing the experience." ❖



Cardiologist **REGINALD BLABER, MD**, is executive vice president and chief clinical officer for Virtua Health.

Photo courtesy of Virtua Health



SARAH CRESPO is the regional director of Patient Experience for Prime Healthcare.

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TONY REED, MD, is the senior vice president and chief quality, safety and experience officer for Inspira Health.

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