



Improving the Patient Experience

By Scott Strother, COO, Well iQ

The Challenge

As the consumerization of healthcare persists, low switching costs, multiple service options and abundant information are all part of the competitive landscape on which healthcare providers must play in order to acquire and keep patients. Occupational Health has the added requirement of satisfying both employer and patient.

The Opportunity

When patients can participate in improving their experience, they become part of the solution, as opposed to passively

hoping for better outcomes; this is the essence of Patient-Centricity. Similarly, when staff are recognized for delivering high standards of care, they become more engaged and focused on performance. This develops a type of shared accountability, which is a critical component of the patient experience. In order to accomplish this, the proper tools are needed- tools that can be effective, while driving transparency, and ultimately improvement.

The Consideration

One of the biggest obstacles to providing a good patient experience is the assumption that only the organization has influence on the process. In most cases, this is a valid assumption, given that the system is structured to place the bulk of the responsibility on the providers. Unfortunately, this not

only puts tremendous pressure on the organization's standard of care, it completely ignores the client/ patient's role in this process. By Empowering the providers and incentivizing the patients to take more active roles in this process, this obstacle can be overcome.

Furthermore, if the bond of dependency between staff and patients can be strengthened, Accountability can develop, which allows expectations to be managed, and higher levels of performance achieved. Maintaining this balance frees organizations to focus on resource optimization and service recovery. However, this balance can't be maintained without first establishing trust in the process. In order to do this, organizations must say what they are trying to accomplish, show everyone involved the efforts being made, and focus not on the flaws, but rather on celebrating successes.

Ultimately, the goal is Improvement, and how to consistently deliver a high standard of care to the customer. Good organizations realize that their customers include patients, clients and employees. It is only through engaging this entire group and proving competence at applying feedback to organizational change, that the organization can move from being reactive, to proactive, to preemptive in their standard of care.

Change is the common denominator for all of this. And while there are many obstacles to change, the biggest one is complacency. The idea that we are better off with what we know, as opposed to what we don't, is the single biggest threat to organizational improvement. Leadership must provide clarity around where the company is, where the company is going, and how the company is going to get there. But perhaps most importantly, leadership must articulate what's at stake, and their commitment to getting there.

The Solution

The first step in finding a solution for improving the patient experience is organizational awareness around current state. Asking the following questions: How are we capturing voice of patient and employer? What are patients saying about our practice and our staff? How are we approaching patient acquisition and loyalty? Are our employees engaged and committed, or is retention an issue? How are we training, recognizing and rewarding our employees?

The answers to these questions lend insight to the desired future state of your organization- thus allowing you invest in the tools needed to make the improvements necessary to bring that future state to fruition:

A survey can be a very useful tool for getting patient feedback. However, First and foremost, the tool must be usable. Most legacy survey products simply don't compel patients to complete them; without a high completion rate, the data you have is insufficient. Keep it simple with little text and no expanding questions. It is also a great idea to provide the patient an incentive to complete the survey, such as an entry into a prize drawing.

Second, you want feedback that addresses not only

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organizational and departmental performance, but staff level performance. Furthermore, getting feedback in real- time allows for service recovery. All of this is critical to driving accountability and engagement.

Third, it is very important to encourage patients to share their experiences on public review sites, which is a vital part of the way new patients choose healthcare organizations and existing patients stay with healthcare organizations.

Finally, recognition and reward programs must be put into place in order to acknowledge everyone's hard work. The importance of patient experience has to be underscored throughout the entire organization, and the bar for desired behaviors set high. Employees will strive to reach that bar, and be more loyal to the organization. As organizations process the feedback and demonstrate the ability to improve based on that feedback, patients will reward them with their loyalty as well. ◀

