



Clinical Update

For Telephone Triage Nurses

January 2020

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Patient Satisfaction and Service Recovery

Improve patient compliance and reduce malpractice risk.

A focus on customer service is both a good medical and business strategy. Positive interactions with good communication can improve patient compliance and clinical outcomes. In addition, a focus on patient experience is a key aspect to risk management and reducing malpractice risk. Improved patient interactions can decrease staff stress and burnout. Patient experience can also directly impact your bottom line. There is a strong link between patient experience and overall profitability of a hospital.

Patients expect good customer service, much as they would from other industries, such as banks or restaurants. Instead of saying “*patients expect*”, however, we should actually say “*we expect*.” This is because all of us have either been a patient or had a loved one navigate the healthcare system. So, what do we want?

- We want to be informed of what is happening.
- We don’t want to wait forever, especially without being informed why we are waiting.
- We want to feel respected.
- We want our healthcare team to be responsive to our questions and concerns.
- We want those we interact with to be knowledgeable and to care about us as people.
- If promises were made, we want those promises to be kept.

Do it right the first time.

- Warm greeting: “Hello, thank you for calling _____. My name is _____. How may I help you today?”
- Placing on hold: “In order to assist you today, I will need to place you on a brief hold. I anticipate it will be 2 to 3 minutes. Will that be ok?”
- Refer to the patient by name. If not sure, ask how he/she would like to be addressed.
- Inform patients what comes next and what to expect.
- Remember your promises.

Complaints are a gift -- use this second chance to get it right!

Service recovery is making things right when they went wrong. It is the process of restoring trust and confidence in your organization. Service recovery is a chance to improve the patient’s perception and potentially earn better customer loyalty than if the mistake had not happened in the first place. This is known as the Service Recovery Paradox. In the Service Recovery Paradox, a very positive service recovery experience can lead to an even greater level of satisfaction than if the service failure had never occurred. The Mayo Clinic and Mass General Hospital teach the steps of service recovery with the L.E.A.D. Model.

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Follow the L.E.A.D. when performing service recovery.

- **Listen.** Repeat back as needed to make sure you understand, and to let the patient know you understand. Speak slowly and use open ended questions when able.
- **Empathize.** Acknowledge the caller's feelings or their concern. When something happens to shake the trust a patient had in you or your organization, empathizing will help you rebuild that trust. It shows you understand how the patient feels.
- **Apologize** without placing blame. It is okay to apologize even if you were not the cause of the patient's concern. Do NOT shift blame to others and certainly NOT to the patient. Avoid "You should have...", "Why didn't you just...". Say "I am sorry" rather than "we are sorry". This should not be a show or platitude. If you say it, you should mean it.
- **Do the right thing.** If you can, fix it. How can you help the patient? Even if you can't give the patient exactly what they want, what *can* you do?

Good customer service is everyone's job. Work in a spirit of partnership with your patient. Despite your best efforts, things will go wrong. When they do, you have the opportunity to make them right. But good service recovery takes forethought and planning.

Key Summary Points

- A focus on patient satisfaction can improve compliance and reduce malpractice risk.
- We are in a service industry and patient satisfaction is tied to business profitability.
- Do it right the first time by putting your best foot forward.
- Complaints are an opportunity to "get it right" and improve customer loyalty.
- Four Key points for achieving service recovery: Listen, Empathize, Apologize, and Do the right thing (Fix it)!

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