

Blood Collector's ATM

Abbreviated Teaching Modules
for staff development, competencies and classroom



Customer Service Excellence #3253

Patients aren't often referred to as customers, but that is what they are. Like any other customer, they are free to pick where they spend their healthcare dollars. Patients who are unhappy with the way they are treated will go to another facility for their healthcare needs. Those who are happy will return to pay for more of the same. Conversely, every healthcare worker has the unique opportunity to gain a patient's loyalty, or lose them forever. The patient's experience is the determining factor. Patient loyalty is directly linked to a hospital's financial health, which equates to jobs and the funds to run the facility. With rising costs, and diminishing income, hospitals cannot afford to lose customers to their competitors due to poor customer service.

The patient's perception is his reality. If he perceives facility staff to be rude and thoughtless, he will view all care he receives through that filter. He may wonder, *are the personnel also careless?* He might become concerned that the staff is not washing their hands when preparing his food or medications. He may be anxious that the medications he is given are incorrect, or that the blood tests are not accurate. There is enough for a patient and his family to be concerned about without having worry whether he should trust his caregivers. If a patient does not have confidence in his caregivers, there is no trust and there will be no loyalty to the facility.



But the trouble doesn't stop with one disgruntled patient. Customer satisfaction research has found that if a customer is happy with a product or service, he may tell one person about it. If he is unhappy with a product or service, he will tell an average of five people. The higher the discontent, the more people he tells. Those who hear about a friend or relative's bad experience will then tell additional people. The facility's reputation doesn't stop decaying there. As the story is passed from person to person, there is a tendency for things to become exaggerated. What may have started as a relatively minor infraction becomes skewed way out of proportion to what actually occurred. This scenario can be prevented by good customer service with every patient encounter.

Bad attitudes chase patients away. Everyone has a bad day, but it is not appropriate to commiserate with your patients. Personal and work problems burden their spirit. Patients and visitors should never overhear gossip or griping. Put yourself in the patient's place by thinking about a time when you were a customer or patient, and overheard an employee whining about wages, understaffing, supervisors, or somebody else. How did that make you feel? If you are like most people, you would rather drive across town to the competitor than take your business back to the place that made you feel uncomfortable. While not usually thought of in that way, negative talk and anything that drives a wedge between patient and facility is poor customer service.

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Patients and visitors are not the only customers in healthcare. The laboratory depends on registration personnel to input patient data correctly in the computer system. Nurses depend on housekeeping staff to maintain clean patient care areas. Physicians depend on the skills of nursing staff. Everyone depends on the maintenance department to keep the facility structure working properly. Just as our patients expect us to perform in a specific way; we depend on others in the facility to do their job properly, too. Co-workers are each other's customers. Not only do fellow personnel depend on each other to properly execute their duties, they also depend on each other to keep the environment a pleasant place to work. As with patients and visitors, bad attitudes also chase away good employees. Negative talk, gossip, and the likes, pull down the morale of everyone in the facility. Nobody likes to be around a negative person. What poisons one department will be toxic to all others. When you hear it, remind co-workers to refrain from negative talk. Negativity is poison in the healthcare setting, sends patient satisfaction rates plummeting, and contributes to high staff turn-over rates.

Healthcare is a service industry. For patients to keep coming back, they need to feel facility personnel are focused on serving *their* needs. They expect a peaceful place where people treat each other in a respectful way. They expect a clean, well organized environment with staff that is helpful, friendly, and knowledgeable. Patients and their family want caregivers who communicate with them with honesty, compassion, integrity, and in terms they can easily understand. They want their expectations to be met.

Patients do not want excuses. It is not the patient's business that the department is understaffed. It is not the patient's concern that the facility had an unanticipated number of admissions. Nor is it their problem that the computer system is down. Don't make excuses for poor customer service. Listen to the customer's concern. Apologize, and resolve the problem or refer it to someone who can.

Use these tips to be a customer service hero!

- Maintain a helpful and friendly attitude, even in the most stressful situations
- Show empathy and compassion to patients, visitors, and fellow employees
- Find out what the customer's expectation is, then try to exceed it
- Make your customer feel important and appreciated
- Be kind, considerate, and helpful
- Remember, your fellow employees are customers, too
- Anticipate your customer's needs, even before *they* know what they are
- If busy, make eye contact, smile, and let your customers know you will be right with them
- Thank your customer for providing you with feedback, even when it is a complaint
- Listen to the customer's concerns, apologize without making excuses, then offer solutions
- Treat customers as you would want to be treated

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Test Your Knowledge:

1. Who in the list below could be considered a customer?
 - a) patient
 - b) visitor
 - c) doctor
 - d) a, b & c
 - e) none of the above

2. It is the end of a long shift with inadequate staffing. Your patient is grumpy from slow care. You should:
 - a) explain to the patient that you were working short-staffed
 - b) tell the patient the hospital was swamped with unexpected admissions
 - c) share with the patient that you wish the rest of the staff were working as hard as you are
 - d) apologize and ask the patient how you can make things better for him
 - e) none of the above

3. You are on the elevator heading back to the lab after morning rounds and a fellow employee is speaking in a negative way about the phlebotomy supervisor in front of visitors. How do you handle this situation?
 - a) tell the co-worker you don't want to hear negative talk
 - b) be silent and don't say anything, even though you resent it
 - c) interrupt the talk by immediately changing the subject, then tell the co-worker in private that the comments were inappropriate
 - d) put an anonymous note in the co-worker's locker
 - e) a or c would be appropriate responses

4. What are some of the costs of poor customer service?
 - a) the facility's reputation becomes tarnished in the community it serves
 - b) doctors will not want to affiliate with a hospital with image problems
 - c) income will decrease as patients go to a competing hospital for care
 - d) high staff turn-over rates and job reductions
 - e) all of the above

5. Dissatisfied customers will tell more people about their experience than happy ones.
 - a) true b) false

6. Providing a sincere apology without excuses and an offer to make things better, is a good way to recover a customer service failure.
 - a) true b) false

Name: _____ Date: _____

Facility/Supervisor _____ Dept: _____