

The importance of patient experience in healthcare

Written by Dr. Duncan Rozario on February 20, 2019 for CanadianHealthcareNetwork.ca



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Discussions about healthcare are often focused only on the care, and forget the importance of the patient's experience of care. What is the difference, and why should we care? Many studies have now demonstrated that a patient's expectations can affect their outcomes after surgery, including the risk of complications. What's more important, a patient's care or their experience of care? That's like asking whether a pilot should be better at takeoff or landing! While patients may not see surgery as it happens, they do understand measures such as respect and courtesy and compassion and emotional connection, and use these as proxies for the healthcare received. Healthcare practitioners need to understand this and be trained in great customer service and service recovery. We need to be engaged and believe in our purpose.

At the turn of the 20th century, a general surgeon in Boston named Ernest Codman developed a novel idea that all hospitals should analyze their results, compare them with other hospitals and publicly report this. Similar ideas were espoused by the British physician Sir Thomas Percival in 1803. Not surprisingly, this was considered heresy, he was shunned by his colleagues at Harvard and lost his staff privileges at Massachusetts General Hospital. Dr. Codman died penniless and unrecognized in an unmarked grave. Today, he is recognized as the godfather of surgical quality improvement. His insights have led to the creation of pivotal programs such as the National Surgical Quality Improvement Program (NSQIP) which is used extensively in the province of Ontario.

How well do we do what we do, and how do we know it? Most of us are asked to give service feedback after our consumer purchases. If we don't measure patient experience, as we measure many other outcomes in healthcare, how can we possibly improve it? The field of patient reported experience measures allows one to assess a patient's perceptions of their healthcare with the aim of doing better. In the United States, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid withholds \$1.9 billion per year from hospitals, and 25% of that is paid based on how hospitals do on their patient experience scores. These scores are universally reported on the CMS website for all to see. This gives patients information to help them decide where to obtain their care. Do we do this in Canada? Why not, and when will we start?

At Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital our vision statement is, "Exemplary patient experiences always." How do we measure that? Our answer was in our article, "How well do we do what we do and how do we know it: The importance of patient-reported experience measures in assessing our patients' experience of care", in the Feb 2019 *Canadian Journal of Surgery*. In the Department of Surgery, we have developed a short patient experience survey based on the Ontario Hospital Association Day Surgery Experience Survey. Using a web based survey tool called SurveyMonkey, we give all patients coming through the Surgical Day Care unit and Ambulatory Care, which represents over 80% of our patients, the opportunity to tell us about their patient experience, so that we can do better. Data is reported monthly, and while these anonymous results are subject

to bias, it allows us to identify problems, not for punitive reasons but for the purpose of improving the training of our staff and physicians. Some of our early results points to issues with postoperative nausea and pain control, inadequate communication, and issues with patient discharge. We are working diligently to address all of these. This is a very easy and cost effective way for any institution to get high volume, real-time, actionable information to improve patient experience.

Paying attention to patient experience is the right thing to do, it's how we would want to be treated as patients, and it's how patients perceive quality. Maya Angelou said, "At the end of the day, people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel." Our patients want to be involved in their healthcare, and as we organize their care around them, they will inevitably and rightly become the center of what we do.

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