

Improving Patient Quality-of-Care with Recognition and Rewards

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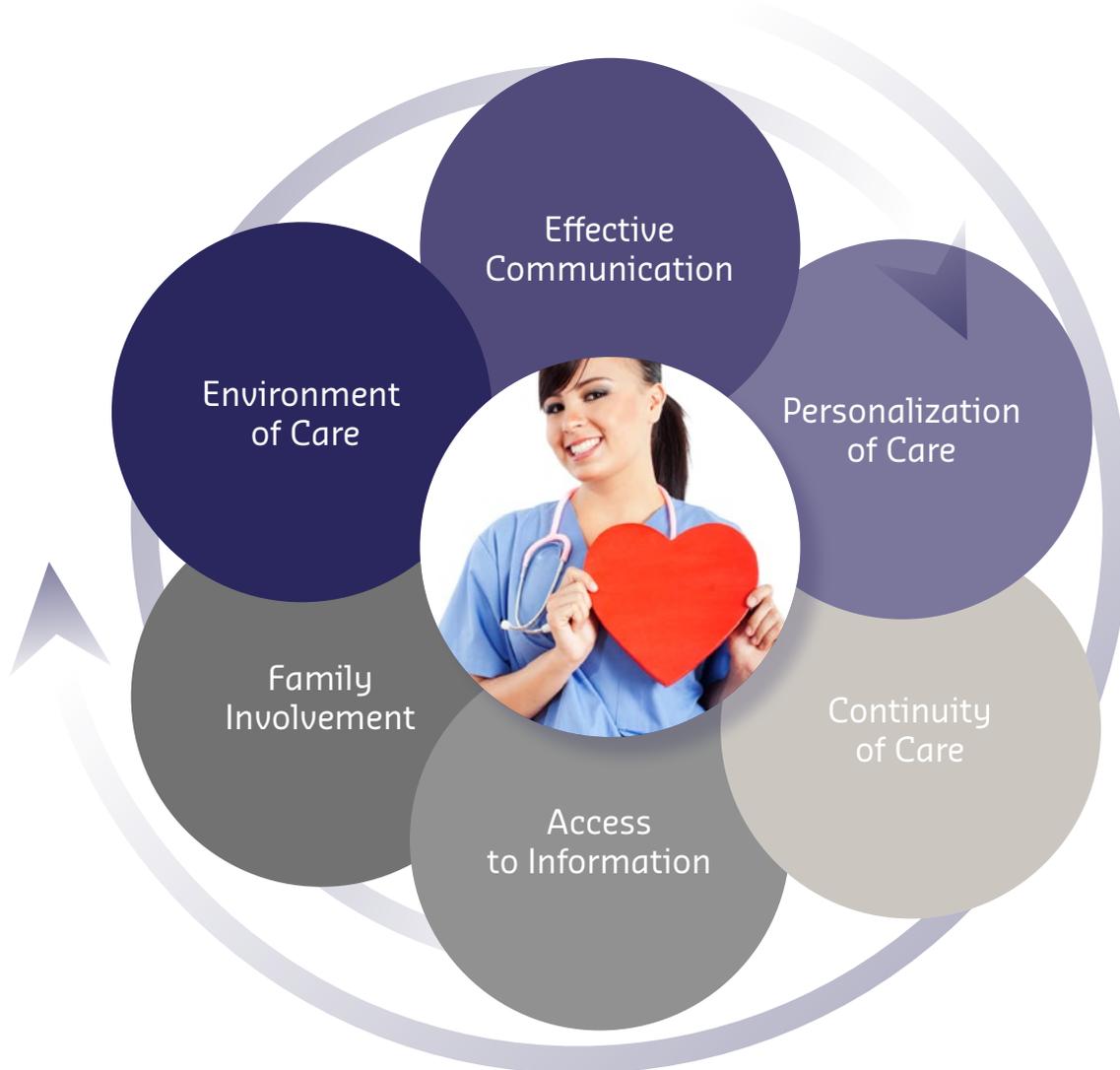


Empirical research estimates that medical errors cost an estimated 19.5 billion dollars in healthcare costs and nearly 400,000 patients die annually due to these errors. ¹As a result, the federal government has adopted a new regulation that creates incentives for hospitals and their staff to improve the quality of patient care. ²This new regulation ties patient care to Medicare reimbursements. In other words, how well a hospital provides patient care determines whether that hospital incurs a penalty or a bonus in the form of a percent reduction or increase of Medicare reimbursement rates. Penalties and bonuses are calculated based upon a publicly available hospital score, **30% of which is determined by a satisfaction survey administered to discharged patients.** ³This survey is designed to assess a patient's perceptions of the quality of discharge information and caregiver-patient communications; the responsiveness of the hospital staff to patient needs; the cleanliness of the hospital environment; and the hospital overall.

IMPROVING PATIENT QUALITY-OF-CARE

Keenly aware of this new regulation, many hospitals are refocusing their efforts on improving patient care. Improving patient care is complex and involves several key areas in the healthcare matrix, from patient check-in, wait time, medical technology, staff compassion and more, some of which are not within the control of individual employees. Figure 1 below highlights some of the main components of a patient-centered healthcare experience.

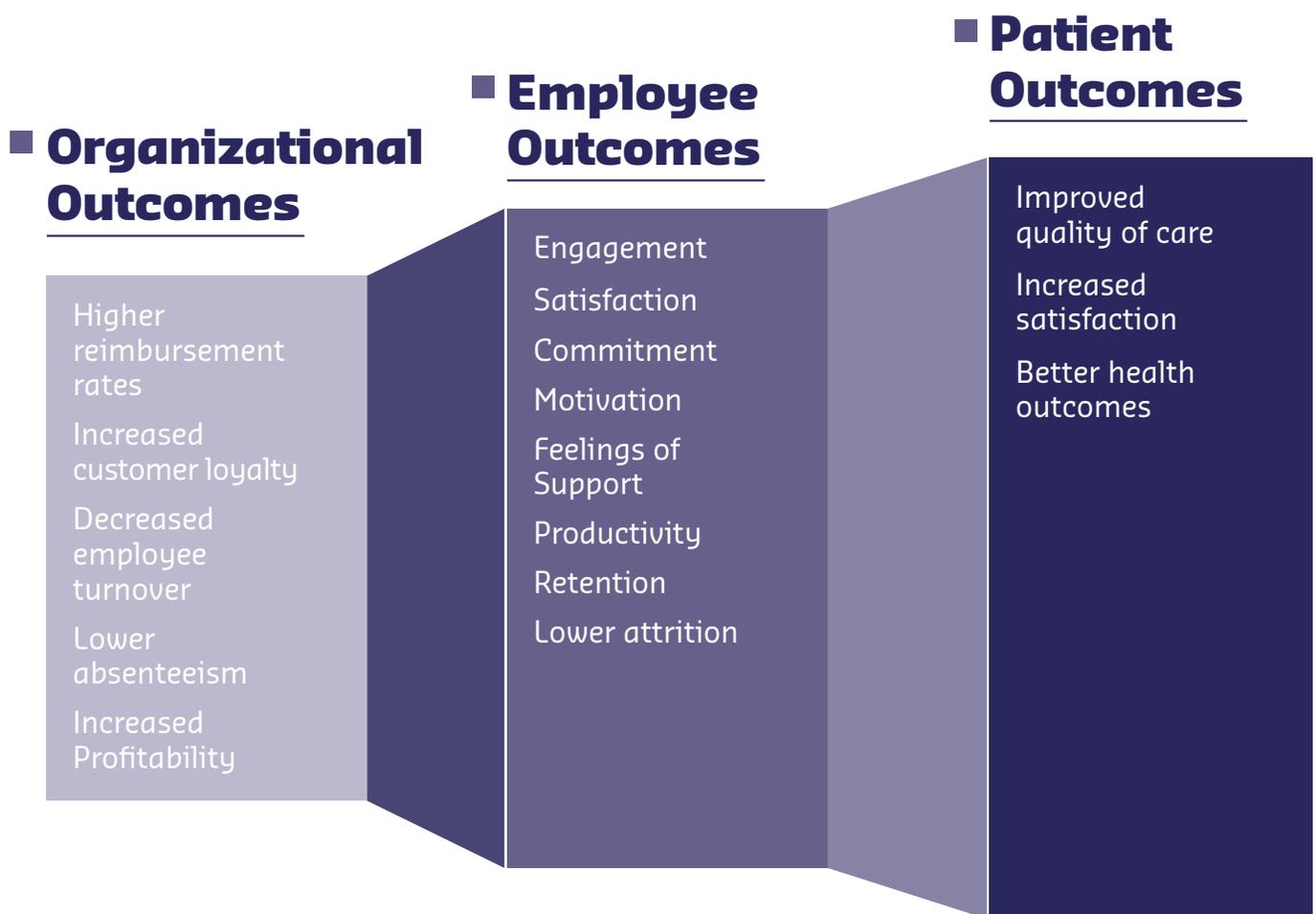
Figure 1: Aspects of Patient-Centered Care



The quality of patient interactions, however, is within the control of hospital staff, particularly front-line employees such as nurses. Unfortunately, those with the most patient contact – and ability to affect patient satisfaction scores – may be limited in their responsiveness to patient needs due to competing time pressures, such as workload, training, and mentoring. Therefore, hospitals must take extra measures to create an organizational culture that embraces and prioritizes patient-centered care.

In fact, hospitals that expect, support, and reward patient care over other competing demands have employees who demonstrate greater work satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation, productivity, and engagement, as well as decreased absenteeism and turnover. Work engagement, in particular, facilitates patient-centered care behaviors⁵ and is linked to a number of positive outcomes. For example, Aberdeen Group reports that organizations with effective employee engagement strategies realize a 22% year over year improvement in customer satisfaction and loyalty and a 21% year over year improvement in retention rates, an issue that is of heightened priority in the healthcare industry.

Figure 2: Outcomes of Recognition & Rewards around Patient-Centered Care



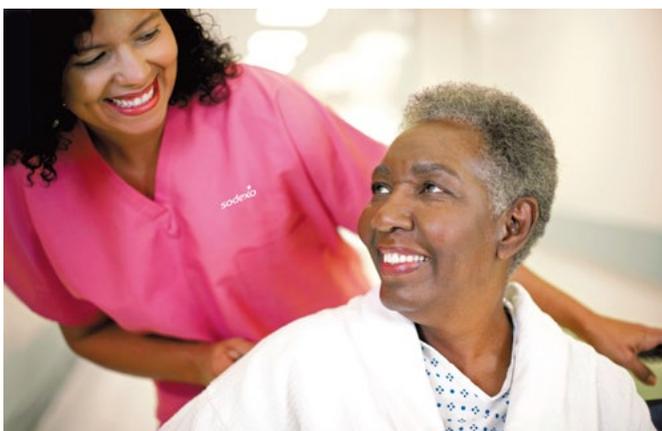
RECOGNITION & REWARDS

One effective engagement strategy is the implementation of a hospital-wide recognition and rewards program. An effective recognition and rewards program designed to increase patient-centered care not only increases employee work engagement, but also promotes a supportive environment in which caregivers are treated with the same dignity and respect that they are expected to show to their patients⁷. Furthermore, recognizing and rewarding hospital staff for their contributions to patient-centered care is linked to improvements in patient outcomes and perceptions of care.

It is important to carefully structure and uniformly administer a recognition and rewards program; otherwise, it will fail to increase the desired behavior or will be unlikely to result in long-lasting behavioral changes. To be successful, a recognition and rewards program designed to encourage patient-centered care should include the following design and implementation basics:^{8,9}

Figure 3: The Basics of a Patient-Centered Care Recognition & Rewards Program

Program Goals	Recognition & Rewards	Program Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SMART Behavioral-based, not outcome-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paired with goals Tailored to employee preferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive & highly visible Conveys managerial commitment
Training	Tracking & Evaluation	Use of Technology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For healthcare workers (behaviors) For managers (recognizing & rewarding behaviors) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing or on a regular basis Easy to access and readily available offering real-time insights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of the patient care experience As part of the recognition & rewards program



RECOGNITION & REWARDS PROGRAM:

The Basics

- Set goals for the program.** Organizational goals inform employees what behaviors are valued and expected within the organization. Extensive research has shown strong relationships among goal-setting, increased employee motivation in the form of extra effort and goal persistence, and performance. Goals, however, should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Goals also should be behavioral-based, not outcome-based. In other words, patient-centered care goals should be kept distinct from patient outcomes. That is, employees should receive recognition and rewards for excellence in patient-centered care regardless of whether the patient’s health improves.
- Identify patient-centered care behaviors.** In a patient-centered care system, patient needs and preferences are paramount. Research demonstrates that patients want quality personal relationships and communication¹⁰ with and empathy¹¹ from their caregivers. While it is difficult to translate some of these needs into specific behaviors, there are a number of behaviors that are easily identified and measured; for instance, asking patients how they would like to participate in their care and being responsive to and respectful of patient needs and preferences. These are worthy patient-centered care goals that, if met, will naturally lead to improved treatment outcomes and increased patient satisfaction scores.
- Link recognition and rewards to behaviors.** Each incentive should be paired with a specific set of patient-centered care behaviors. In other words, simply distributing recognition, incentives, and other rewards without pairing them with a clear, consistent set of behavioral contingencies reduces the potential to achieve the desired outcome and may result in decreased employee engagement. These pairings should be outlined prior to implementation of the program and uniformly and consistently distributed. For example, individual-level compliance might be rewarded with praise or a note card, while unit-level compliance might be rewarded with a plaque or a luncheon.
- Tailor recognition and rewards to employee preferences.** A range of awards – monetary rewards, gifts, experiences and non-monetary recognition tools – are ideal to satisfy your various employees’ needs and desires. Be mindful of how employees want to be recognized. For example, some people are uncomfortable with public attention and prefer more private, low key recognition. To be effective at reinforcing behavior, recognition should be timely and specific. This shows that management is paying attention and cares about the employees’ level of effort.
- Communicate.** A recognition and rewards program designed to improve patient-centered care goals must receive a high level of visibility within the hospital. This is best achieved through a comprehensive communication plan. All hospital employees must understand what the program is designed to accomplish and how their performance will be measured, evaluated, and rewarded. Research emphasizes that management is key to these objectives. All levels of management, from senior executives to front-line supervisors, must publicly commit to, communicate and, more importantly, treat patient-centered care as a priority.¹²
- Train staff members involved in the program.** Train all hospital staff to provide exceptional patient-centered care and provide them with a checklist of patient-centered care behaviors appropriate to their department, unit, or job type. Also, train leaders, managers, and direct supervisors how to effectively recognize employees for their outstanding contributions to patient-centered care.
- Track & Evaluate.** All aspects of the recognition and rewards program should be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure that program goals are being achieved. Technology should be leveraged to achieve these objectives efficiently and effectively. For example, caregivers can be electronically prompted to deliver patient-centered care at each patient interaction, or “touch point,” and that interaction should be documented for continuity of care as well as for monitoring and evaluating the program and accurately distributing rewards.

Leverage Technology. To further facilitate program goals, technology also can be leveraged to facilitate patient-centered care and communicate to the patient that his or her care experience is a priority. For example, information technology (IT)-guided disease management and telemonitoring systems have been shown to have positive effects on health care process outcomes, disease-specific clinical outcomes, responsiveness to patient needs and preferences, healthcare provider-patient collaboration and communication, and access to medical information.¹³

As another example, technology can be used to prompt direct patient feedback while the patient is still under hospital care. This can be easily done by strategically placing computer kiosks at every check-out and waiting area throughout the hospital. This strategy is a great way to gauge patient satisfaction while there is still time to ameliorate any concerns and to recognize healthcare workers for quality patient care in real time.

Pairing a strong commitment to patient-centered care with a well-designed recognition and rewards program helps hospitals provide exemplary patient care and yields benefits in terms of better patient clinical outcomes, improved patient satisfaction scores, and higher employee work engagement levels. Simply put, committing to patient quality-of-care improves the overall effectiveness of organizations and the health, safety, and well-being of patients!

Patient safety programs should have clear goals that are attainable by all employees and can be benchmarked over time.



CASE STUDY

Objective

An academic health system with 6,300 employees based in the Midwest looked toward Sodexo to increase recognition among its frontline workers. Recognizing staff members who directly connect with patients and families has become an important concern among healthcare leaders after the HCAHPS legislation was instituted. The health system specifically wanted to increase employee motivation and engagement, administer appropriate rewards while offering choice to the employee, and implement a solution that was scalable for future program implementations.

Implementation

Based on their company values and desired outcomes, Sodexo implemented an employee recognition platform with an on-the-spot recognition program. From the beginning of the technology development through the launch of the platform, a communication plan was executed in order to keep employees involved, obtain their feedback, and attract attention to the program. Managers were able to order in bulk via the inventory management system on the recognition technology platform, making it easy to deliver on-the-spot recognition to frontline staff.

Sodexo also provided a way to give daily recognition to frontline workers while bringing measurable tracking to each occurrence of recognition. Non-monetary printable eCards that tied to each of their corporate values were created and given to employees who had demonstrated a desired behavior. Furthermore, Sodexo's platform incorporated a spotlight module to highlight exemplary employees, as well as an online manager tool kit which included tips for creating a culture of recognition.

Results

In response to these efforts, program awareness increased among the health care managers and compliance and consistency for on-the-spot recognition program was established. Managers indicated satisfaction with the tools provided for more effective and efficient recognition. Employee engagement and satisfaction increased, as did the number of employees that were recognized. Most importantly, employees indicated that they felt valued and motivated by the rewards they received, and the company had governance over programs with access to real-time data on recognition occurring within the organization.



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