WHAT WAS THE CHALLENGE, OPPORTUNITY OR ISSUE FACED?

Understanding the patient experience through the eyes of the patient and their loved ones is critical in today’s healthcare environment. The information is vital to highlight and celebrate the areas where exceptional patient care is occurring and understand where to focus improvement efforts to take the patient experience to the highest level. The patient experience, positive or negative, will leave a lasting impression that will be shared with others and perhaps become a part of the decision making process when others are weighing the options about where they receive care. Obtaining this critical perspective can be difficult through commonly used assessment tools such as patient surveys as the depth of information can be limited and filtered.

During 2014 and throughout 2015, AtlantiCare, was embarking on a merger with Geisinger Health System. As the two healthcare organizations combined their patient care expertise, they were also melding cultures. Dwight McBee, Corporate Director-Customer Experience for AtlantiCare McBee had been with the organization for a year and a half and felt the timing was right to take a deeper look at the true state of their customer service culture. McBee and fellow leaders wanted an unfiltered view of their care delivery process to understand the true voice of the customer.

To better understand their patient experience, McBee and his team tried forms of internal mystery shopping with limited success. Methods of internal medical mystery shopping included department leaders calling other departments to document the experience. They also relied on leader rounding to witness caregiver interactions with patients. While internal mystery shopping provided pockets of valuable information, McBee felt information was being missed as leaders were only able to see that moment in time, and employees were aware of their presence. Ultimately, the organization was unable to dedicate the necessary resources for a systematic approach that would allow them to sustain and scale their own mystery shopping efforts. McBee wanted to learn, at a department and individual level, what was going well, identify strengths, validate weaknesses and reveal opportunities for improvement.

WHAT DID YOU DO TO ADDRESS IT?

To remove the filter and understand the “why” behind survey results, AtlantiCare engaged with Baird Group to provide a comprehensive mystery shopping assessment in 2014 and throughout 2015. McBee felt an organized, professional third party mystery shopping assessment would be the best approach. With the additional detailed information, they could develop a plan to take their patient experience to the next level. The assessment consisted of, patient visits in ambulatory settings, care partner observers (CPO’s) in inpatient areas and phone calls throughout the system.

The assessment was conducted using a unique, organized and systematic method to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. Professional mystery shoppers documented their experience not only in a quantitative rating method, but in a qualitative method by explaining how the experience made them feel as a patient and why they would or would not recommend or return to the organization. Mystery shoppers captured the patient experience from the first impression on the phone, through their arrival at the facility, way-finding, and general impressions of the facility and interactions with all care staff and providers.

McBee found that the external assessment by Baird Group removed the filters and excuses to reveal the true patient experience, including strengths and opportunities. The information provided a focused action plan road map for AtlantiCare to enhance their patient experience today and long into the future.

WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES?

At the conclusion of the mystery shopping assessment, results were presented through an onsite presentation to the senior leadership and department managers. McBee states, "The level of detail from the assessment provided something for everyone in the room. The 50,000 foot view gave the big picture with important themes. But we also got down to specific details that aided leaders in coaching individuals. Having senior leaders in the room was powerful. It is important to know exactly who we were. The final report showed us that exactly."

According to McBee, “The external mystery shopping assessment results created a “burning platform” for improvement by elevating service gaps to the highest level. The results were objective when otherwise they can be very subjective.”

Following the report, results were cascaded to mid-level managers and department staff, within and outside of the areas that were mystery shopped. All information was shared transparently, meaning details, including individual staff names were shared throughout the organization.
According to McBee, the most important item obtained from the mystery shopping assessment was the individual employee level feedback. McBee said, “The individual results allowed for real conversations to be had. It was not punitive, it was coaching. It was really gold.”

In addition to the individual employee results, the entire assessment results were used for various immediate and long term improvements:

- Improved overall hospital star rating from 3 stars to 4 stars. (source: CMS)
- Improved nurse communication star rating from 3 star to 4 stars. (source: CMS)
- Maintained and improved employee engagement scores throughout merger of AtlantiCare and Geisinger Health System, best in class employee engagement. (source: Avatar)
- Prompted development of system wide standards for telephone etiquette using the E3 method of evaluation.
- Evaluated previously used patient experience assessment methods and determined which methods were adequately capturing the true patient experience.
- Results used as an “impetus to align” through merger of AtlantiCare and Geisinger Health System and implementation of CI Care.
- Used photo documentation and insight from assessment for long term physical structure improvement planning.

ABOUT ATLANCARE

AtlantiCare, a member of Geisinger Health System, provides health and wellness services to the community at nearly 70 locations throughout southeastern New Jersey. It is the region's largest healthcare organization and largest non-casino employer, with more than 5,170 employees and 600 physicians in nearly 70 locations.

AtlantiCare is an integrated system of services designed to help people achieve optimal health. It includes, AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center, AtlantiCare Health Engagement, The AtlantiCare Foundation and AtlantiCare Health Services. AtlantiCare is a 2009 recipient of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the nation's highest presidential honor for quality and organizational performance excellence.

AtlantiCare is Magnet Designation, presented by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), Nursing Magnet Designation is widely considered to be the gold standard for quality in the nursing profession. AtlantiCare mission: We make a difference in health and healing, one person at a time, through trusting relationships.

AtlantiCare values: Integrity, Respect, Service, Teamwork and Safety

For more information, please visit http://www.atlanticare.org/

ABOUT THE BERYL INSTITUTE

The Beryl Institute is the global community of practice dedicated to improving the patient experience through collaboration and shared knowledge. We define patient experience as the sum of all interactions, shaped by an organization’s culture, that influence patient perceptions across the continuum of care.

www.theberylinstitute.org