

Client profile

Methodist Health System, serving Nebraska and Southwestern Iowa, operates three hospitals, 21 clinic locations, and a nursing and allied health college. The system won Professional Research Consultants' 2015 President's Award for achieving excellence in employee, patient and physician satisfaction.

Challenge

Maintain or increase both patient experience and employee engagement during rapid growth in patient volume, which spiked from September 2014 to July 2015 and continues today.

Solution

- Gain cooperation throughout the system by tapping into an existing culture of excellence and leaders' transparent communication style
- Use research tools to track perceptions of stakeholders and guide actions to maximize satisfaction among patients, staff, physicians and the public

Results

- Improved patient experience, physician satisfaction and employee engagement scores
- Increased consumer "top of mind awareness"
- Met increased demand for healthcare services

Caring Culture Rises to Challenge of Patient Surge

Methodist Health System Gracefully Absorbs Rise in Patient Volume



At Methodist Health System, based in Omaha, Nebraska, the meaning of care goes well beyond administering medicine and performing procedures. A man hospitalized

at Nebraska Methodist Hospital was distressed that he wasn't able to shop for a present for his wife. One of his nurses volunteered to make a quick trip to the store, where she bought three scarves. She returned with the purchases, and the man had the satisfaction of selecting a gift and presenting it to his wife.

Attention to small details and making the extra effort are commonplace at Methodist Health System. But could the hospital sustain that level of attention with as many as 1,000 new patients a week visiting Methodist clinics and hospitals? The sudden increase in volume spiked from September 2014 through July 2015 due to a sudden change in the market that limited patient access to other providers. Increased volumes continue to present day.

Industry data predicted that the strain of the extra volume would have a negative impact on patient experience and employee engagement scores.

Methodist Health System rose to the challenge, however. The three-hospital, 21-clinic system not only survived the growth but managed to enhance the patient and employee experience during that time.

Methodist attributes its success to its strong culture of service excellence and multi-dimensional research tools applied by Professional Research Consultants, Inc. (PRC).

Meeting and Exceeding Patient Expectations

"What if your mother or father were the patient? How would you want her, or him, to be treated?"

— Anthony Chisem, Food Service Director

Methodist Health System fiercely embraces its commitment to service excellence. Implicit in its tagline, “The Meaning of Care[®], is the promise that leaders and employees at every level of the organization give their best effort every day, while fostering and recognizing excellence in others. Leaders empower employees to strive for greater caring, achievement and success.

“The Meaning of Care’ is our language. It’s not just a tagline. It’s our home. We take it personally,” says Debbie Kohl, employment director.

The staffing required to care for the influx of patients ballooned from 180 to 500 open positions in just three weeks. Methodist’s culture of caring was challenged by staggering drains on its human resources. Yet, employees’ patient-centered focus never wavered.

Methodist employees did more than satisfy patients and customers. They delighted them. Results of a consumer research study exceeded all industry expectations.

“Patients new to Methodist reported having such positive experiences that more than 80 percent said they will stay with us for their future healthcare needs,” says John Fraser, president & CEO of Methodist Health System.

Factors to which he attributes his team’s ability to transform an unexpected challenge into an opportunity include:

- **Compassionate care**
- **Medical and service excellence**
- **Solid communication and teamwork**
- **Flexibility**
- **Responsiveness**
- **Innovation**
- **Hard work**

“...We owe our success to communication.”
– Holly Huerter, Vice President, Human Resources

Engaging Employees

“We received a gift of patients, and we wanted to keep them and show them our best. This took lots of cooperation among departments.

We owe our success to communication.” – Holly Huerter, Vice President, Human Resources

Across the health system, Methodist leadership remained visible and supportive throughout the rapid growth period. Daily rounds through their departments allowed managers to address volume issues and other concerns immediately.

Employees at all levels accepted the importance of collaborating within and between departments to achieve service excellence.

Every morning, at every Methodist hospital, dozens of directors gather in a room, standing and listening attentively as they take turns giving 30-second updates on their departments.

Nursing unit staff huddle twice a day with environmental services to ensure that everyone is working together for the good of the patient.

Lisa Fidone, director of Rehab Services for the system, outlines how she keeps her staff engaged:

- **“We communicate between groups and we’re always sharing information with each other.**
- **“We bring in resources, like PRC, to help us drill down to key drivers for changing performance.**
- **“We set goals for key drivers and reward and recognize achieving goals. Sometimes it’s a pizza party; sometimes it’s a special parking place in the winter or a thank-you card. One time, it was a bonus.**
- **We’re not caught up in titles because, at the end of the day, it’s about our patients getting the best care.”**

PRC’s analysis established a direct correlation between employee engagement scores and patient experience scores — when certain employee engagement indicators change, they had a corresponding effect on patient experience scores.

“There’s relatively little, if anything, that affects patient satisfaction more than employee engagement. How care is delivered, how politely, how compassionately, is facilitated by employee engagement. It’s symbiotic,” Fraser says.

Employee surveys conducted by PRC showed that Methodist’s percentage of highly engaged employees increased significantly from 2013 to 2015. The system moved from the bottom quartile (28.1 ranking for highly engaged employees) to the top third (66.1 percentile) in PRC’s national database.

Using Multiple Research Tools to Drive Decisions and Validate Success

"I'm a Deming disciple. The data PRC provides help us follow a classic Deming performance improvement cycle." – John Fraser, President & CEO

Methodist used five different studies in its strategy to manage the surge in patient volume from September 2014 through July 2015:

- Patient experience
- Physician satisfaction
- Employee engagement
- Consumer "top of mind awareness" of Methodist
- Community Health Needs Assessment

"The more we measure, the more feedback we can give our staff, and the more we can work on improving," Fraser says. "The more detailed our data became, the more impactful results we saw. We used the results mirrored with team engagement to drive quality outcomes."

During the 10-month rapid growth period, Methodist's numbers spiked in every category studied. This feedback energized employees and inspired them to move forward, Fraser notes.

Lessons Learned

"You can't fake culture. To get everyone on board, you have to verify your culture first. Our culture of caring is our magic sauce. We used communication vehicles continuously to hit key messages — from leadership and during hiring and orientation." – Stephen Zubrod, Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer

Fraser offers insights into how Methodist Hospital System manages and maintains a culture that has been 125 years in the making. Every few years, system leaders revisit core values and how they play out in the culture.

"We include all of senior management, all of middle management and our first-line management to define what we stand for and how this is reflected in our behaviors," Fraser says. "Taking the time to involve the entire leadership team is how we get the buy-in and accountability."

Transparent communication and close collaboration with staff and physicians also drive cultural cohesiveness.

"Staff know best how to get the work done. We pay attention to their comments and observations when determining the direction we take. Physicians also have input on strategic and operational issues," Fraser says.

"The more detailed our data became, the more impactful results we saw. We used the results mirrored with team engagement to drive quality outcomes." – John Fraser, president & CEO of Methodist Health System

He notes that the hiring process for new employees considers not only competency to perform the work but a sense of altruism that matches the Methodist culture.

"I have 6,000 people in this organization who aren't hesitant to remind me if I make a statement that's not in keeping with the culture. The strength of our culture carried us through this time and determined our success."

Key strategies that kept the culture strong included:

- Consistent, direct communication from leaders to employees
- Action plans to address key drivers that improve performance
- Commitment to wow new patients, make them feel special and persuade them to stay in the system
- Staff involvement in creating culture, values and standards of care
- Physician participation in monthly operation meetings
- Creation of a Patient Advisory Group, including physicians, clinical staff, nurses and patients
- Leaders modeling the behavior they expect from the staff
- Rewards, recognition and appreciation to perpetuate a culture of care. "We told people we were appreciative and paid a bonus during that time," Fraser relates. "We received feedback that the bonus was great, but what really mattered to people was that we recognized their efforts and were appreciative."

In a letter sent to all employees at the end of 2015, Fraser affirmed the system's gratitude and ongoing commitment to achieving long-term success in a constantly changing healthcare environment:

"...I thank you for going above and beyond ...Every measurement of satisfaction and engagement rose during the volume surge, and Methodist gained an unprecedented jump in market share, greatly strengthening the organization's performance and fiscal future ...Our people are our greatest strength. We must never grow complacent. We must continue to support and live the culture of caring that serves us, our patients and community so well."

Methodist Health System employees sign an agreement annually to uphold The Meaning of Care Standards. Basic tenets of the detailed written pact include:

- As an MHS employee, I am committed to being respectful, courteous, compassionate, and providing exceptional care and service to our patients/customers, their families, students and each other.
- I take responsibility for every patient/customer in our facility. This includes welcoming patients, being courteous and kind, and listening to concerns intently.
- I take ownership and pride in our organization and in my individual job.
- I understand that keeping our patients and ourselves safe is everyone's responsibility. I also take responsibility to not engage in behaviors that undermine a culture of safety.

About PRC

Professional Research Consultants, Inc., (PRC) brings excellence to healthcare through custom market research. It remains the largest privately held market research firm dedicated solely to the healthcare industry. In addition to being a certified vendor for government-mandated CAHPS surveys, PRC also provides custom research services that measure community perceptions, brand positions, patient experience, physician alignment, and employee engagement. PRC also conducts community health needs assessments in accordance with IRS guidelines. PRC was founded in 1980 and is headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska.



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PRC Engagement Link[®]

Teetering but Trying

Departments that score low in patient experience and high in engagement are working hard but may not be working smart as a team. They are innovative in their way of thinking but they are not strategic in their planning to enhance the patient experience. They are willing to try new things and learn from their mistakes. They want to do an excellent job but are missing the mark. These employees put forth effort and are invested in the success of the organization. However, they may not have the workplace support or resources needed to enhance the patient experience.

Indifferent and Ineffectual

Departments that score low in patient experience and low in engagement are not working well as a team. They are not effective and efficient in their planning or strategy when setting department goals. They are not willing to try new things and fear making mistakes. These employees do not put forth the effort needed to provide an excellent patient experience because they are not provided the interpersonal and workplace support needed to enhance engagement and the patient experience.

Committed and Clicking

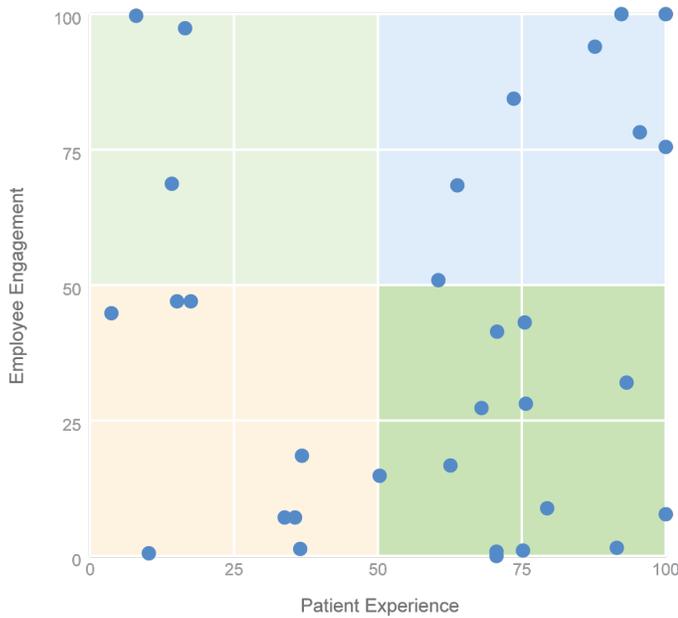
Departments that score high in patient experience and high in engagement are not only working harder, they are working smarter as a team. That means they are strategic in the way they're planning; they are innovating. They are willing to try new things and learn from their mistakes. These employees are invested in the success of the organization, and that is demonstrated in the interactions with external and internal customers, whether patients, doctors or co-workers. They are provided the interpersonal and workplace support needed to enhance engagement and the patient experience.

Cautious but Competent

Departments that score high in patient experience and low in engagement are focused on performance measures but may lose sight of the bigger picture. They are not innovating but do know how to get the job done. They are not willing to try new things and fear making mistakes. They work within the parameters of their job descriptions however they do not put forth extra effort in citizenship behavior or strategic planning. They are provided workplace support but need additional interpersonal support to enhance engagement.

Hospital Patient Care Areas

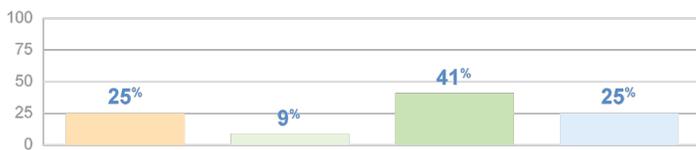
July – Dec. 2013



Jan. – June 2015



Quadrant Distribution of Methodist



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