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Asante Three Rivers' Imaging Department's dramatic patient experience results earned the hospital a national award from HealthStream.

Patient experience

How ATRMC Imaging nearly doubled its patient experience scores

Three years ago, Asante Three Rivers' Imaging Department was trapped in a pattern familiar to many hospitals. Patients generally liked what they experienced, telling surveyors that the staff usually met their expectations. But reaching the top answer — that the staff *always* met their expectations — was harder to achieve.

The reasons varied, but two themes emerged: “We didn’t know how to decode our data to determine what patients wanted,” said Jen Perry, director of Imaging who now helps drive ATRMC’s patient experience improvements. “And employees were a little lost without the tools to make meaningful change.”

To remedy this, her team dove into the patient experience scores that measure the patient experience. They educated themselves on how to interpret responses in a way that would translate into actions. Setting aside the things they had no control over, the staff focused on areas they could influence directly: patient comfort and privacy, and employee respect and courtesy.

Behaviors soon followed. Instead of standing at the door and calling for patients, staff members walked out to the lobby to greet them. The team spruced up the dressing rooms and provided scrubs instead of gowns for more privacy. They offered bottled water after exams, and — similar to upscale retailers — gave the customer a thank-you card with a chocolate mint. Perhaps most important, they involved family members in the process and took the extra time to establish a personal connection with the patient.

With the help of HealthStream, the organization Asante contracted with in 2016 to administer patient surveys, employees started using HealthStream’s Words that Work and RELATE, a communication acronym that stands for Reassure, Explain, Listen, Answer, Take action and Express appreciation.



They developed key phrases on their focus areas of comfort, privacy, respect and courtesy, and used them when narrating care, a practice that is now insisted upon.

“It is up to us to ease their fears, and to explain why we do what we do,” Perry said.

An ultrasound tech, for example, may tell a patient, “I see you are here for an ultrasound today. Before I begin, let me explain the exam.” And, “Now I’m going to put gel on your stomach. It will be a little cold, but it won’t hurt.”

As a result of these efforts, patient experience scores rose from the 53rd percentile in early 2014 to the 92nd percentile by the end of that year. The department has sustained top decile scores ever since. To cap it off, in August ATRMC Outpatient Services was awarded the national HealthStream Excellence Through Insight award for overall outpatient experience.

“We can never be perfect,” Perry said. “But we can always, and should always, want to be better.”

This article is part of an ongoing series on how Asante hospitals, departments and clinics are improving the patient experience. Is your team doing something remarkable? Please share your story at asantenews@asante.org.

Asante News is published every Tuesday. The deadline to submit articles is 5 p.m. Wednesday.
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