Engaged Employees, Satisfied Patients at MetroWest

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Vitals
MetroWest HomeCare & Hospice in Framingham, Mass., is a hospital-based agency serving 39 cities and towns in suburban Boston. Affiliated with MetroWest Medical Center, it offers care to some 300 home care patients and 40 hospice or “bridge to hospice” patients in 40 communities at any one time. The for-profit agency, owned by Vanguard Health Systems, has 90 employees.

Challenge
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Home care can be a difficult environment for fostering patient and employee satisfaction. From the patients’ perspective, the clinicians and staff who enter their homes may be different from visit to visit, communication can be a challenge and scheduling can be difficult to control. From an employee’s perspective, each patient’s home is uncharted territory that can present new and unexpected hurdles. Building a cohesive employee team can also be difficult when much of the work is conducted independently in the field.

“We said we need to improve,” says Jane Pike Benton, executive director of MetroWest HomeCare & Hospice. The goal of fostering greater employee engagement guided the efforts that followed. “We are very much of the philosophy that things need to be done with teamwork,” Pike Benton says.

MetroWest’s ultimate objectives were to move its patient satisfaction scores up to the 90th percentile or higher and to change the organization’s culture to be more service-oriented at all levels. As it turned out, having an engaged workforce was a key driver of consistently higher patient satisfaction scores.
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— JANE PIKE BENTON
executive director of MetroWest HomeCare & Hospice

Solutions
MetroWest used Press Ganey’s national database and Priority Index to focus on specific areas that were likely to have the greatest impact on patient satisfaction.

One example was managing phone calls, which had been an ongoing challenge, according to Pike Benton. Employees were answering calls in different ways, and callers ended up having to explain their situation several times before getting to the correct person who could help them. The issue came up repeatedly, and by tapping into suggestions from Press Ganey’s Solutions Starters®, MetroWest was able to standardize its phone greetings, voice mail messages, and phone call triage procedures so that calls would be handled in a more consistent and efficient way, whether the person answering was a home care aide on a cell phone or the receptionist at the agency’s front desk.

Press Ganey consultants were also able to guide the organization in setting up its survey tool and cover letter for the HHCAHPS survey to make the most of the format, Pike Benton says.

MetroWest regularly uses the Priority Index, which enables Press Ganey clients to pinpoint areas that are highly correlated with good performance and that can offer the greatest improvement in satisfaction levels if addressed.

As the organization began to examine its patient satisfaction scores, it soon became apparent that satisfaction would benefit from a more engaged workforce. “You can’t move that needle without making sure your employees are really engaged and committed to the project,” Pike Benton says.

To that end, she decided to put together a hand-picked team to focus on patient satisfaction, serve as role models for other employees and “shift the culture of the organization.”

The effort blossomed into a program called “Great Expectations!,” which MetroWest launched in March 2007. The name reflects the expectations employees are expected to have for service to patients. Eight staff members were chosen to be on the initial team, and they began meeting every two weeks to organize special projects related to improving the organizational culture. The vision was to use this group of committed employees to drive change within the organization that would enhance both patients’ and employees’ experience and drive patient satisfaction scores higher.

The Great Expectations! team’s work is guided by Press Ganey tools. Members receive Press Ganey’s question analysis report monthly and review the quarterly summary report carefully, focusing their efforts on the Priority Index and the top two items on the previous “Top 10” to identify upcoming target areas for improvement, Pike Benton says.

One of the team’s first tasks was to create a way for employees to easily grasp the service commitments that were most important to MetroWest’s success. After some brainstorming, the group developed “The Great Eight,” a description of key service commitments that was rolled out to employees in a “unique and funky format,” Pike Benton says. Illustrated as a flowering plant, each of the organization’s eight service commitments are spelled out around the leaves and stems:

- Privacy: Always be respectful of the individual.
- Professional demeanor: Present a positive attitude, appearance and tone.
- Effective communication: Listen, share and respond.
- Creatively embrace change: Approach change with a joyful spirit.
- Accountability: Accept responsibility for every facet of our role, no excuses.
- Rapid response: Prioritize and reply quickly.
- Respect: Hold honor and regard for all.
- Great expectations: Anticipate, achieve and surpass.

“We said to people these aren’t just words on paper, these are service commitments we have to live by,” Pike Benton says. To reinforce the importance of these commitments, managers explain them to new employees during their orientation process. They are also included in employees’ performance evaluations and in quarterly accountability reports managers fill out for each employee.

When new employees get off the elevator on their first day at work, they immediately step onto a red carpet that leads to a welcome sign with their name and title. Their photo is taken and posted on a bulletin board so other employees can recognize them and welcome them aboard during their first few weeks at MetroWest.

Joan Thompson, a physical therapist at MetroWest and a member of the Great Expectations! team, says this level of engagement is felt by patients.

“When we are happier where we are in our jobs, our own personal job satisfaction, that’s obviously going to come across to the patient,” she says.

For hospital inpatients, Press Ganey has found the correlation between employee satisfaction and patient satisfaction to be relatively strong at 0.53. While there is not as much data available for home care patients yet, the correlation is likely to be similarly strong in that sector, says Tiffany Phillips, RN, BSN, Press Ganey’s manager of improvement services.
Performance and Outcomes

In addition to fostering an environment where employees feel engaged, valued and dedicated, MetroWest HomeCare & Hospice has seen a consistent elevation of its patient satisfaction scores since it began the Great Expectations! program, says Pike Benton. In the second half of fiscal 2006, the agency’s scores ranged from the 35th to the 59th percentile of Press Ganey’s national patient satisfaction database for home care. By the fourth quarter of fiscal 2007, the agency’s Press Ganey patient satisfaction percentile rank had risen to the 90th percentile, and for fiscal 2009 it remained at that level.