Empowered Employees, Satisfied Patients at Baptist Easley Hospital

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Vitals
Baptist Easley Hospital in Easley, S.C., is a 109-bed, not-for-profit, general acute-care facility. The largest care provider in Pickens County, it is affiliated with Greenville (S.C.) Hospital System. It provides services such as surgery, lithotripsy, advanced imaging and emergency and outpatient care, as well as cardiopulmonary services. It has a 40,000-square-foot outpatient services facility, a 4,000-square-foot diagnostic cardiac catheterization laboratory and a large network of primary care medical practices.

Challenge
In 2004, hospital leaders wanted to become the provider of choice in their region, but they knew they had some issues with dissatisfied employees and physicians. “We had to start from within,” said Dale Garrett, the 109-bed hospital’s director of quality. “You cannot fix things unless you know what is wrong. We knew what our goals were, but we needed to know how to get there. Conducting a survey on our employees and physicians allowed them to voice their opinions.”

Solutions
The hospital uses measurement tools and improvement resources from Press Ganey’s Performance Satisfaction Suite™ to improve patient satisfaction with care in inpatient units, the emergency department, ambulatory surgery and outpatient care. It also utilizes Press Ganey’s Employee Partner and Physician Partner products to assess its relationship with employees and doctors.
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— DALE GARRETT
director of quality, Baptist Easley Hospital

Performance and Outcomes
With recent employee satisfaction scores at the 98th percentile nationally and physician satisfaction scores above the 90th percentile, highly engaged caregivers have led to patient satisfaction scores at the 99th percentile for surgery, 96th percentile for inpatient, 97th percentile for outpatient, 83rd for the emergency department and 96th for physician practices. The hospital had an 87% employee retention rate for 2009, along with a registered nurse vacancy rate of 0.7% compared to a national vacancy rate of 8.1%. The quality of care provided by Baptist Easley Hospital is well above the South Carolina state average; it remains close to 100% compliance in all core measures for the Center of Medicaid and Medicare Services. Infection rates are continuously lower than national average. Its standardized mortality rate has remained below the national average since 2005.

As a result of those achievements, Baptist Easley in November 2010 became the only two-time winner of Press Ganey’s Partner of Choice Award.

How can a hospital succeed in serving patients if its employees and physicians aren’t happy with their jobs? It’s a simple question, and yet many health care providers fail to ask it. Six years ago, Baptist Easley Hospital did. Its response has been a top-to-bottom commitment to addressing the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of everyone who works at the hospital, which in turn has paid off in better care for patients and more satisfied patients.

The commitment starts with new employee orientation where hospital CEO Roddey Gettys instills the idea of the importance of customer service and teamwork. He meets again with them 90 days later to review their experiences. Twice a year Gettys speaks before all employees on what the hospital is trying to achieve. And once a year all employees get together to share the “3 Is” — information, inspiration and ideas.

Baptist Easley’s unique team structure drives improvement. Twenty-two service teams made up of leaders and employees address core issues such as employment, standards of behavior, inpatient satisfaction, emergency department satisfaction and rapid response. Each team monitors its service area for performance and whether it is meeting the hospital’s strategic goals.

Ensuring adequate communication has also been a hallmark of Baptist Easley’s success. Leaders routinely round on employees, seeking their input on key decisions and finding out what issues they confront. Employees participate in bi-annual forums and annual meetings with Gettys, at which they have the ability to share their experiences, questions, concerns, issues and ideas. From these interactions, trends are identified and changes can be made as appropriate.

Communication boards are displayed throughout the main corridors of the hospital and within individual departments. These communication boards are filled with information for employees and physicians divided into the six focus areas of Baptist Easley Hospital — people, service, quality, finance, growth and community. A weekly newsletter, Easley Communications, is also e-mailed to all employees to disseminate hospital information, education opportunities and events.

The hospital also works hard on streamlining communications between physicians and other employees. When someone leaves a message for a doctor, the person taking the information is instructed to let the doctor know what the call or page was about, find out what information the doctor might need to respond to the inquiry and be prepared to get that information. White boards at nurses’ stations say when doctors paged a nurse and what they were looking for.

One idea that bubbled up from employees was ending the use of external nurse staffing agencies, despite problems in recruiting new nurses to the area. In 2004, Baptist Easley was spending about $1.5 million annually on agencies, using them throughout the hospital, except for obstetrics. “There was a lot of concern among nurses about the quality and the commitment of patient care from the people we were bringing in,” says Mary Ann Hunter, director of nursing services. “So we formed a nursing team of nursing/front-line staff. Staff really became engaged and developed a comprehensive initiative to make things better for a nurse working in a front-line position. And it has worked; since 2006 we have not had an agency nurse here and we have actually had to turn away qualified people simply because we did not have any openings.”
Employee feedback to leadership also was crucial in solving a major issue of safety and quality. Leadership safety rounding had nurses providing an earful about overnight pharmacy access. From every nursing group, leaders heard that the pharmacy was inconveniently closed at night, and getting morning doses in a timely fashion was difficult. Gettys responded, and despite budgetary pressures, the hospital now has 24/7 pharmacy, which has improved patient care and nursing and physician satisfaction.

Front-line staff members even hire new employees. Baptist Easley uses a peer-interview process where managers perform the initial screening of job candidates, but the final interview and decision-making is made by peers.

The same peer interview process was brought into the physician arena, with a slightly different twist. Physician candidates are first vetted by leaders and recruiters, but then the peer interview team meets and decides whether to hire or not.

Keeping physicians involved in improvement initiatives is an important driver of the hospital’s success. The hospital has a Quality Coordinating Council led by physicians. Every quality initiative goes through the committee and then through the hospital’s medical executive committee, the CEO and the board of directors. Improvement processes are continuously shared with physicians, supported with evidence-based details, and initiated in a way to ease physician compliance and allow them to remain focused on patient care.

Gettys reaches out about twice a month to meet with all clinical departments. These structured meetings offer the opportunity to find out how to improve quality and safety and make the patient experience of care better. “Several years ago when we would go to medical executive committee meetings, there would be a lot of feelings of ‘Why am I here?’ and general feelings of confrontation and ‘us versus them.’” Garrett says.

Gettys also spends time reaching out to physicians in private practice, who might otherwise feel excluded from hospital decision-making. He drives out to a dozen or so practices regularly, trips called “Roddey on the Road.” At each office, he asks physicians what issues they are confronting and shares updates on hospital news and business issues with them.

Providing the engaged staff with data is critical to patient satisfaction. All executive leaders, medical directors and department managers have access to Press Ganey Online. Hospital supervisors and coordinators are also granted access to Press Ganey Online by the request of their managers. Departments report patient satisfaction scores to their employees as frequently as weekly, while others report monthly or quarterly.

As part of its employee empowerment campaign, Baptist Easley created a number of formal recognition programs, including Employee of the Month; Volunteer of the Month; Employee of the Year; and, in March 2008, a quarterly recognition program for physicians, which has been a huge success. Garrett says. “It really gained credibility because the first award went to a physician who was in private practice, which showed how inclusive it is.”

As with any high-quality improvement effort, Baptist Easley’s is ongoing. “We review our internal priority index on a quarterly basis in order to continuously monitor what matters most to our patients. Not only do we focus on the top 10 priorities, but we also monitor how often that priority has been in our top 10,” Garrett says. “The close monitoring of our internal priority index allows us to focus our attention and develop action items on those areas that matter most to the population we serve.”