Enhancing the Patient Experience as a Key to the Healing Mission

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Vitals
Florida Physicians Medical Group (FPMG) is the Orlando, Fla. area’s largest multi-specialty medical group practice. Its 225 board-certified physicians and surgeons in more than 30 medical specialties work in over 90 practice locations throughout central Florida. The practice is affiliated with Florida Hospital, which is comprised of eight hospital campuses. Both organizations are part of Adventist Health System, a nationwide, faith-based health care system.

Challenge
Two years ago, FPMG had no formal process for measuring or improving patient satisfaction. FPMG leaders began to discuss how to formalize the assessment of customer service. Having so many practice locations spread out over a large geographic region, each with its own legacy modes of behavior, meant the challenge wasn’t a small one.

The effort became part of a new vision statement for the group: “To be the preeminent multi-specialty medical group of central Florida.” That vision had as its three “defining platforms” the group’s mission – to extend the healing ministry of Christ – its clinical product and the “patient experience.”

“We had to then think about what it means to be preeminent in our patient experience,” says Cynthia Parent, FPMG’s director of operations, who added patient satisfaction oversight to her responsibilities in 2009. This was just after FPMG decided to partner with Press Ganey, and before Katavi Jones was hired as program manager for patient satisfaction – the first employee to have a full-time responsibility for customer service.

The first satisfaction survey found that overall satisfaction with FPMG placed it in the 54th percentile of the national database. Scores were particularly low for the overall visit, at the 40th percentile; and nurse/assistant, at 39th percentile. “Our leadership was not pleased with the 54th percentile,” Parent says. Under her leadership the organization set a goal to have each practice at or above the 75th percentile nationally.
Solutions
FPMG adopted the Press Ganey Patient Visit Insights™ solution after careful consideration of what was currently in the market. “The reporting tools within the Press Ganey product and their broad specialty data was key in our decision-making,” says Bryan Stiltz, president of FPMG.

In weekly calls, Press Ganey Client Improvement Manager Steve Widder and Jones discussed phone etiquette and scripting. It also was recommended that FPMG use mystery shoppers to find out what was going on at their locations and adopt proven practices at their other sites.

Another key tool is “shadowing champions.” Employees whose performance is deficient in an area such as friendliness are encouraged to go to another site and work with someone who has succeeded with that issue. Staff members are also asked to say “my pleasure” to at least four patients a day until it becomes part of their routine. This year, FPMG has been doing mystery shopping on its high-performing sites, and attempting to spread positive observations to other sites.

Performance and Outcomes
FPMG’s employees and patient satisfaction team have focused diligently on the patient experience, and this has paid off. The overall satisfaction rating for FPMG is currently at the 78th percentile nationally.

Three other areas of significant focus also improved dramatically:

- Helpfulness on the telephone started at the 54th percentile on its first Press Ganey survey in 2009; by the third quarter of 2010 that rose to the 83rd percentile nationally.
- Access to care started at the 56th percentile in 2009 and is now at the 79th percentile nationally.
- Likelihood to recommend practice rose from the 68th percentile to the 86th percentile today.

The Improvement Story:
Like many organizations that have succeeded in dramatically raising patient satisfaction scores, FPMG has worked hard on customer service problems identified by its Press Ganey Priority Index, using a multi-pronged approach.

“Katavi is the poster child for the super user of Press Ganey data,” Widder says. “She is all about tracking the reports because she knows the numbers are a reflection of behaviors and that is what we want to change for the better.”

Employee education now begins at orientation, where Parent and Jones lead the customer service portion of the event. They play a video called “it’s a Dog’s World,” a humorous comparison of a patient office visit to a dog’s visit to a vet, illustrating the themes of customer service.

Then using a presentation called “The Journey to Preeminence,” the two walk new employees through a range of expected behaviors. For example, a segment covers “compassion behaviors.” These include what to say when entering a patient exam room (name and title, along with what the employee is doing there); how to listen actively; how to project a positive image and energy; and how to go above and beyond in engaging patients and families, including creating surprises and special moments.

“Customer service is vital to our success and we stress the importance with all our staff throughout the organization such that it now represents 20% of their annual performance evaluation score,” says Parent.

Site Visits:
For practices that have an overall ranking below the 50th percentile, Jones and Parent have crafted an in-service program on customer service. “We have each practice go through its Press Ganey report and tell us three things they want to improve on during that quarter. We then do a site visit and an in-service for all staff members,” Jones says.

The in-service is structured as follows: Jones starts each site visit by having employees fill out a form that lists things they like and dislike, looking for what motivates them. The results, she says, let managers know a little bit more about their staff. “Then we talk with employees about helpful phone tips, such as smiling when on the phone. We talk with clinicians about how they greet the patient; how to break down any fears that the patient may have with coming into the practice. We also go over Hot Comments® and how to utilize them to improve specific items quickly,” she says.

Mystery Shopping:
At Press Ganey’s urging, Jones has become the main “mystery shopper,” playing the role of a patient both on the phone and in person. “I can quickly find out if there is breakdown in registration,” Jones says. “Am I waiting a long time? Does anyone notice me? Does the nurse come and get me, and does she use my name? Is she washing her hands in front of me? If the physician is running behind, am I kept informed? Sometimes it takes someone with a fresh pair of eyes to come into a practice and see things that those who are there every day might not notice.” Following each mystery shopper experience, Jones creates a report that is given to the manager that outlines what she found, both positives and negatives.

Shadowing:
FPMG has adopted the strategy of having employees who need extra training on areas such as answering telephones or speed of registration to spend time with employees at other practice sites that excel in those areas. “We try to identify our customer service stars in each area,” Jones says. “A practice manager may contact me with an issue where employees need help. I will contact another manager and say, ‘You are doing really well on registration; do you mind if a couple of sister employees come over and shadow your registration people to see how you do it?’ Observing someone in the same position who has succeeded in projecting a friendly attitude, it hits home a little more than me just going in and telling someone how to do something.”

Recognition:
“We are finding ways to make good customer service fun,” Parent says. Part of the fun is rewarding employees for a job well done. One such program is an annual awards celebration held during one of the monthly office managers’ meetings. The Star Award goes to practices that have achieved at least the 95th percentile on overall rating for four consecutive reporting periods.
A second recognition activity surrounds the use of Hot Comments in a practice. “Hot Comments are a great barometer of what is currently going on in the practice, often behind the scenes, and can be used as a tool for implementing immediate, positive change,” Parent says. One office manager took all of the positive Hot Comments, blew up the size of the text and put them on a large poster in the break room. This activity highlights for employees how their interactions impact patient satisfaction. “Managers are encouraged to do these things on their own, which adds a personal touch tailored to what motivates the people in that office,” Parent says.

**The Future:** The longer-term goal for the group is to have every practice above the 75th percentile ranking nationally. As part of that goal, the patient satisfaction team wants to expand customer service training to all employees who haven’t gone through the customer service orientation program.

In addition, FPMG wants to improve the toolkit for office managers to help educate their staff and to customize the customer service program to the unique culture of each practice.

“The results speak to FPMG’s significant progress toward preeminence and Press Ganey’s solutions have been a significant resource in this journey,” Stiltz says.