

## How Hospitals Can Maximize the Patient Experience

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### *Story Highlights*

- *A quality experience requires commitment from every employee*
- *Engaged workers make an emotional connection with patients*
- *Strengths-based management helps build optimal teams*



Patient-centered care has one ultimate goal: healing the patient. But in healthcare today, the patient *experience* is also a top priority.

The 2012 *HealthLeaders Media* Patient Experience Survey -- covering more than 300 senior, operational, clinical, financial, information and marketing leaders in healthcare -- found that 84% of healthcare leaders place the patient experience among their top three priorities. For healthcare providers of all sizes, there is value in delivering a high-quality, engaging patient experience.

This type of patient experience is a carefully choreographed event that many factors -- and healthcare roles -- influence. The experience starts with a clean, well-decorated patient lounge, continues with empathy from nursing staff, and ends with smiles from employees at checkout. This kind of quality experience requires commitment from every healthcare employee.

One of the challenges hospitals face in delivering a consistent and positive patient experience is ensuring that employees are on board with established goals and desired performance outcomes. For example, many providers understand the importance of creating emotional connections with patients. A strong patient-provider connection engages the patient and develops patient relationships that are enduring, promote healing and encourage an optimal patient experience.

But training employees to build emotional connections is easier said than done; teaching staff how to talk with and listen to patients is more difficult than teaching technical skills.

Gallup consultants have worked with many clients as they tackle this critical challenge. We've learned that managing for strengths can help align employees with a hospital's patient experience goals. By adopting a strengths-based approach to managing and developing staff members, hospitals can overcome the challenge of instilling knowledge and skills and begin providing an optimal patient experience by making the most of employees' innate talents.

### *The Basics of a Strengths-Based Management Approach*

**Understand and appreciate each employee's unique talents.** To build an engaged and optimized team, managers first need to discover each person's talents, style, goals, needs and motivations.

**Identify the tasks and activities that each person does best.** With an understanding of what each employee does best, managers can use individual contributions to build a stronger team.

**Help employees understand, appreciate and invest in their unique talents.** The better that managers can help employees apply their dominant talents, the greater each person's and the team's potential will be to consistently act with confidence, direction and excellence.

Managing for strengths does more than maximize talent: Employees who use their strengths every day are six times more likely to be engaged in their jobs, and their engagement level affects how they care for patients. Considering how emotional elements affect the patient experience, this finding is uniquely significant to leaders in healthcare. Gallup research shows that engaged healthcare workers are better able to establish an emotional connection with patients and their families -- improving the patient experience.

To better understand how strengths-based management can help hospitals improve the patient experience, Gallup recently interviewed some of its healthcare clients to discuss how they benefit from using strengths. Their insights show how using a strengths-based management approach can improve the patient experience.

- **Employees unite as a team to meet a clear and compelling performance goal.** Using a strengths-based approach to management helps leaders and employees identify "the end game, and who can maneuver that the best," says the director of organizational development at one strengths-based hospital system.
- **All employees know how they contribute to the team.** The same director says that working from strengths has helped the hospital's patient rounding team better connect with patients. "Everyone has their talent and their focus area." They draw on their strengths when interacting with patients, whether their focus is clinical or whether they are looking at the communication board to see what services patients need and when.
- **Employees have a better understanding of one another, are more collaborative and intentionally structure tasks and responsibilities to maximize the team's talents.** An anesthesiologist and manager at a hospital using a strengths-based approach says the insights that strengths offer are helping the hospital's surgical and office teams collaborate more effectively. "[Strengths] guides daily interactions in the workplace and helps you understand who you are working with better."

Managers who make strengths the backbone of their management approach can tap into employees' innate power and potential, helping them improve speed and productivity, resilience and growth, longevity and attendance, and innovation and precision. Working from their strengths also can help increase employees' passion for their work. Across all departments and roles, strengths-based management helps build teams that perform optimally -- and contribute to better patient experiences.

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