

The Patient Experience – A System-Wide Perspective

According to the Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality (AHRQ), the patient experience is defined as “the range of interactions that patients have with the health care system, including their care from health plans, and from doctors, nurses, and staff in hospitals, physician practices, and other health care facilities”. One of the key components in achieving true patient centered care is gaining an understanding of the patient’s experience throughout the continuum of care.

Even with the adoption of patient centered medical homes, patients still experience a very fragmented healthcare delivery system. There are a myriad of reasons including lack of EHR interoperability, multiple patient portals, a payment system still driven by volume over value, and complex conditions that require increased collaboration amongst specialists, hospitals, primary care providers and health plans.

To truly shift towards patient-centered care, healthcare organizations might consider expanding their view of patients beyond the four walls of their clinic. The ongoing discussions around data sharing, social determinants of health, and community partnerships further support this idea. The patient experience is a range of interactions with various healthcare entities according to AHRQ. As such, we must trace and map these series of interactions, the idea is to find commonalities in challenges faced by patients across the health system, and work together to improve them. It is not the responsibility of just one organization but all organizations that the patient encounters throughout their care.

Research shows that patients with multiple co-morbidities or complex conditions benefit from care management and care coordination. Why? Often because these patients are juggling multiple appointments and tests as well as learning how to manage their health condition via lifestyle changes, medications, physical activities, etc. The stress levels patients feel when interacting with the healthcare system is also compounded by such challenges as not having insurance coverage or sufficient level of health literacy.

What are some steps that can be taken by healthcare organizations to improve the experience of their patients?

- Go beyond patient surveys – shadow patients & families in real-time & create a Care Experience Flow Map
- Define ideal patient experiences based on population health factors
- Institute regular leadership rounding to speak with patients, families and caregivers about their experiences
- Talk with staff at all levels of the organization to gain feedback on their view of patient experience and how it can be improved
- Partner with hospitals, specialists, and other community organizations that your patients regularly interact with to identify system-wide opportunities for improving patient experience
- Utilize data from patient surveys, focus groups, etc. to identify gaps and areas for improvement in care delivery and patient or team communication

- Consider making an assessment your own staff's social determinant of health needs and use such information to improve staff's satisfaction and the interaction between staff and patients

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