



## Service Strategies

*Health Care's Resource for  
Service Excellence*

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## What Can You Do in Eight Seconds? You May Be Surprised

**Eight seconds.** That's how long it takes to form a first impression. If you think about your own interactions, you can quickly see the validity of this statistic. Whether at a job interview, a social event or a retail setting, we form impressions quickly. So do our patients.

Patients in a clinical setting take eight seconds or less to form an opinion about the facility, the care providers and their overall experience. What you don't know about these experiences can and does hurt you.

Those first impressions are formed based on multiple "moments of truth" – seemingly insignificant impressions and interactions that really make a difference in terms of how your health care organization is perceived. Whether it's the tone of voice the receptionist uses when answering the phone, the availability of a parking space, the length of wait time, the cleanliness of the waiting room, the uniforms worn by clinical staff, or the interactions between staff members, every little thing makes a difference.

*The challenge is that, when we're on the inside, we often fail to recognize what is really important to patients.*

Just last week I had a meeting with the executive team of a health care organization during which we talked about the patient experience. I asked the group: "How do your patients gauge the quality of the services they receive?" A physician leader in the room responded: "It's whether or not we're able to provide them with the clinical care that they need." **The answer was predictable but, based on a lot of research, misinformed.**

Health care providers define quality by clinical outcomes. There is no dispute that clinical outcomes are an imperative of every health care organization and individual provider. The trouble is, patients aren't able to effectively evaluate the clinical care that they receive. Instead, their impressions of the quality of care they receive is based on things that resonate with them – like the friendliness of staff, the cleanliness of facilities, whether they feel listened to and respected, etc. These are the things that research, and our own experiences at Baird Consulting, prove to have an impact on the patient experience and ultimately result in trust and loyalty.

**Yes, clinical quality is important – it's critical. But it's a threshold expectation that our patients have when they interact with us.** When we step safely off a plane after reaching our destination, we don't give extra points to the airline for getting us there. We expect them to do what they promised. We *do* notice, though, if the gate agent is surly, the flight attendant unfriendly, or if our baggage doesn't arrive when and where we do. The same is true of our patients' interactions with us. They expect us to be clinical experts. But they expect more than that.

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Despite all of the research that's been done, it can still be difficult to see beyond our internal perspective. If we want to continue to earn the opportunity to serve current – and attract new – patients, however, we must be open to understanding the patient experience from the patient perspective.

There is a lot of discussion these days about improving the patient experience. **The question is; do you fully understand what your patients are currently experiencing? If so, are you open and receptive to change?** That is the million dollar question. Unless you are open to learning the truth and willing to make necessary changes, you can't possibly improve the experience.

We have worked with some organizations that enter the assessment process terrified that we will come back with recommendations that will be costly and overwhelming for a workforce that is already stretched. The truth is, many of the experience issues that we identify can be improved with low-cost or no-cost changes. But you have to be willing to take an honest look at the current situation and be willing to change.

What are the moments of truth that most resonate with your patients? Are you ready to find out and to act on *what's important to them* while, of course, continuing to focus on the clinical outcomes that *we know* are critical to providing quality care?

**Our patient experience boot camp, which we'll be offering in March**, is designed to give health care organizations an opportunity to think “from the outside in” **about how patients experience health care**. You'll learn about some tools that you can use to assess what the patient experience is like right now in your organization – and some strategies for how to make significant changes, without spending a lot of money.

At Baird Consulting we've helped many health care organizations do just that and the transformation can be significant. In my speeches I always talk about the patient experience. It is all about trust. Everything our patients see, hear, smell, and touch has got to instill a greater sense of trust in the health care organization and the professionals with whom they interact. For too long we've been somehow duped into thinking that quality is all about clinical outcomes. In the process, we've become far too relaxed about the myriad of other things that can make or break the trusting relationships we have with our patients.

Are you open and ready to learn? Are you open and ready to change? If you are, I encourage you to sign up for our patient experience boot camp. You – and your patients – will be glad you did.

Learn more about how patients gauge their experience in our 90-minute presentation on CD, with pre-session activities and workbook – **What You Don't Know (about the customer experience) Is Hurting You**. Bring an exceptional training program to your staff for only \$89 – materials are appropriate for both self-directed learning and group training sessions. The CD contains a workbook for evaluating your organization.