



## CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE DRIVES STRONGER REVENUE CYCLE SATISFACTION

Customer Service within the healthcare industry has become one of the most critical components supporting the delivery of care to patients. Whether in a clinical or administrative setting, with The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, HCAHPS scores, healthcare consumerism and market competition, customer service has become crucial in all aspects of a hospital's patient interactions.

However, merely saying we provide excellent customer service does not suffice! Customer service needs to be more than a motto, a plaque on the wall or words on a website. Customer service is a state of mind. It must reside in the heart and soul of an organization's culture.

All of us have experienced poor customer service at one time or another, so let's talk about how to achieve customer service excellence, as well as the actions required to be a best-in-class customer service provider.

First and foremost, you must set an organizational standard that, in every encounter with a patient, you will go above and beyond what the patient expects. It is not simply answering a question or dealing with an issue. Instead, you must reach the next step: establish a level of comfort in the mind of the patients that all their needs (realized and unrealized alike) are being addressed.

### SETTING SUBSTANTIAL CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPECTATIONS AND MAINTAINING THE SUPPORT NECESSARY TO CARRY THEM THROUGH REQUIRES LEADERSHIP. COMMUNICATE THE MESSAGE AND EXPECTATION LOUD AND CLEAR.

- Post it prominently on your website that customer service is paramount.
- Share it throughout your organization and departments, where patients and staff alike will be constantly reminded of its importance.
- Reflect your commitment to customer service in every verbal and written communication that interacts with patients. Emphasize your organization's care, compassion and concern for patients and their needs.

## WHAT'S NEXT IS THE HARD PART ... WALK THE TALK!

As leaders, you need to ensure that your staff has the resources to be successful. This includes outsource processes with external vendors, which is sometimes overlooked because it is incorrectly perceived as someone else's responsibility. In reality, it is equally important that external partners are committed because of the challenges of being a separate organization. This means that customer service-related interactions need to be part of every job description. You can't simply say "I want you to provide excellent customer service" and then evaluate staff performance based on other criteria. Patient interactions need to be evaluated based on an established level of customer service that can be measured and monitored.



Ultimately, customer service-related criteria can be used to support compensation levels. Along with revised job descriptions, you need to establish productivity measures that encompass the time required to interact with patients, the very interactions necessary to provide that extra level of service you are aspiring to.

A critical aspect to achieving excellent customer service is to ensure that all staff interacting with patients demonstrate specific abilities. An empathetic-yet-calm personality lends itself to these interactions, as do solid communication skills, and what some experts have referred to as "emotional intelligence". This means they have developed the personality characteristics as well as the emotional control to deal with extremely sensitive patient issues. It is critical to train staff to interact very empathetically (and not over-emotionally) when assisting in finding solutions to patient issues and challenges.

Remember that two of the most sensitive emotional factors that people face are health and money. Our healthcare environment places the patient in the crossfire, simultaneously dealing with both of these sensitive topics. Such a situation has the potential to devolve swiftly into a customer service challenge.

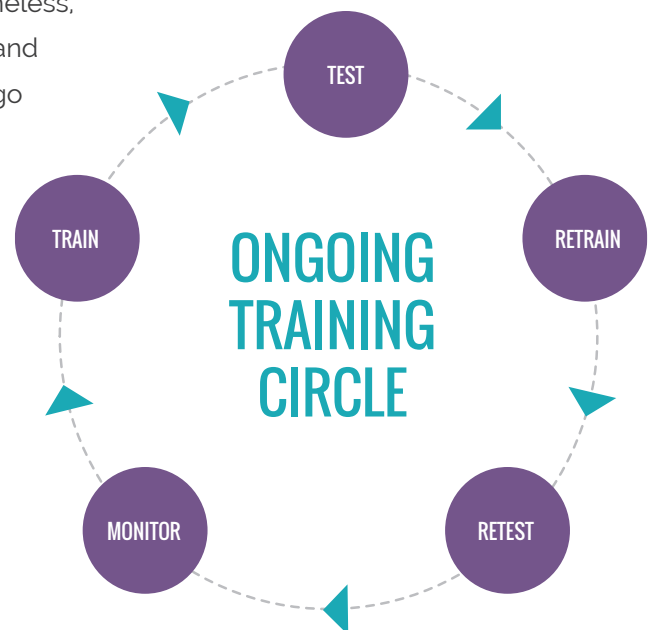
Even a 5-minute phone call allows the opportunity to build a positive relationship with a patient. However, to achieve excellent customer service you will need to recognize four basic personalities and/or communication styles that patients exhibit:

**Spontaneous – likes to talk..... estimated 40% of the population**  
**Agreeable – avoids conflict .....estimated 25% of the population**  
**Directive – to the point.....estimated 25% of the population**  
**Logical – wants to see data .....estimated 10% of the population**

These personality types are important to identify correctly because doing so will best guide a successful interaction with that patient. Spontaneous people will respond emotionally to points discussed, and will question rules unless they understand and agree with those rules.

Agreeable people are people-oriented, often with a nurturing and encouraging interactive style, they will respond positively. Directive types need to see the big picture, act independently and may come across as impersonal. Finally, and the least common, patients of the Logical type are responsible, structured, like to see facts and follow rules. Recognizing these personalities in early interactions is not always easy and people typically have some blend of these characteristics. They may even display different types across multiple interactions. Nevertheless, accurately identifying the closest type in a given situation, and knowing how to react and respond to the differences, can go a long way in winning consensus over a difficult situation.

Even taken together, communication skills, emotional intelligence and good listening abilities do not completely constitute the ideal staff member. There are additional levels of knowledge that must be mastered. These require development of technical skills and ongoing training to be knowledgeable enough to deal with the challenges that arise. Proper training is a constant and continual priority.



Call centers operating in healthcare facilities need to ensure that their staff is educated and trained on all the organization's current policies and procedures, as well as the healthcare industry revenue cycle and payers processes. These technical skills, along with the aforementioned empathy, communication, listening and other interpersonal skills, are essential components of all training programs. For staff to become and remain proficient, following the ongoing training circle is a must.

To enhance your level of patient satisfaction and achieve a best-in-class customer service operation you should ensure you have these areas addressed within your organization.

- Establish and communicate your commitment to customer service
- Your organizations and department mission statement should describe your commitment to excellent customer service
- Senior leadership must endorse and publicly support the initiatives
- Foster an environment where staff recognizes the commitment and customer service mission
- Evaluate job descriptions and requirements to support excellent customer service
- Staff performance measures need to recognize customer service initiatives
- Ensure you have the right people with the right skills in all patient contact areas
- Establish training initiative focused on customer service techniques
- Develop QA process to review staff interactions with patients
- Utilize telephone call recordings as both training opportunities, as well as recognizing successful interactions with patients
- Recognize and celebrate successful customer service calls and promote the positive experiences throughout the organization

Avadyne Health offers workflow software and outsource revenue cycle services to optimize financial results and elevate patient financial experience. Contact us to learn more about our solutions and how they can add value to your customer service and the patients' financial experience.

We embrace the highest standards of customer service. SMART Training is our unique and intensive educational approach to training and coaching. Our patient representatives hold certifications with CPAT/CCAT Certified AAHAM. The average tenure of our patient representatives is 10 years. Though no comparable metrics exist, we would bet it's the longest in the industry. In addition, we maintain PPMS certification, held by just 1 percent of bad debt recovery firms, which demands rigorous adherence to collection guidelines and guarantees staff professionalism.

Expertise and results matter. We provide services to over 275 providers nationally, placing over \$3 billion in new accounts with us each year. Our experienced staff services more than 5 million patients annually and maintains an impressive 95 percent satisfaction rating with patients. We're No. 1 in Early Out/Self Pay according to Black Book 2015. We're ranked in the top 10, largest, revenue cycle management firms by Modern Healthcare.



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