As healthcare focuses on customer satisfaction, in addition to clinical outcomes, caregivers and providers are starting to consider patient and resident preferences. This approach is all about humanizing the healthcare experience and is sometimes referred to as **patient-centered care**. “Patients expect good clinical and nursing care, but they don’t have effective ways to evaluate those aspects of their experience. What people can evaluate, however, is how they are treated in a healthcare facility,” noted Madeline Hoffman, Director of Employment at Hallmark Health System in Massachusetts. In the long-term care sector, a similar trend is occurring. Resident-centered care is a variation of person-centered care which focuses on issues related to aging and chronic diseases. The goal of resident-centered care is to keep elders independent for as long as possible, while supporting their choices in a dignified manner.
About the 2013 Healthcare HR Influence Survey

In April 2013, HealthcareSource and Planetree conducted their joint online 2013 Healthcare HR Influence Survey. This six-question web-based survey was open to all U.S. healthcare professionals. A total of 516 respondents provided valuable information about how hiring and performance management affects the patient or resident experience. The survey asked respondents to react to six statements:

1. HR is considered a strategic partner by your healthcare organization’s leadership and has an active role in making sure employees provide person-centered care.

2. At your healthcare organization, HR has a strategic initiative related to hiring healthcare employees who will positively impact patient or resident satisfaction.

3. Talent acquisition professionals at your healthcare organization assess candidates’ “service-excellence competencies” (such as: compassion, active listening, and adaptability) during the hiring process.

4. Employees at your healthcare organization have performance goals centered around service-excellence and increasing patient or resident satisfaction.

5. From top leadership to staff, everyone at your organization has the educational resources they need to provide person-centered care and increase patient or resident satisfaction.

6. Your HR department (including Learning and Development) utilizes talent and learning management technology to ensure person-centered best practices are adhered to throughout your healthcare organization.

A total of 516 qualified respondents participated, representing a range of different roles and departments.

When It Comes to Promoting Person-Centered Care, Human Resources Can Play a Central Role

But problems may arise if communication gaps exist between HR, managers, and frontline staff. The survey revealed gaps between departments, leaders, and frontline staff when it comes to how HR best practices can influence person-centered care. The first question in the survey asked whether HR is considered a strategic partner by the healthcare organization’s leadership and whether it has an active role in making sure employees provide person-centered care.

According to the survey results, 82% of respondents strongly agree or agree that HR plays a strategic role in making sure employees deliver person-centered care.

However, further analysis shows inconsistencies between the views of frontline employees as compared to HR professionals and organizational leaders.
Around one quarter of RNs (28%) and just 20% of directors of nursing felt that HR played a strategic role in providing person-centered care, while 47% of executives and 43% of HR directors agreed that HR activities promote person-centered care in the organization. “These results show a potential disconnect between what we believe, as individual HR professionals, as administrators, as CEOs, and recruiters, and what is actually occurring within our own organization at the direct care level,” said Jim Kinsey, Director of Planetree Member Experience.

This discrepancy may be due to the fact that the expectations expressed during the interview process are not consistent with the expectations that emerge after an individual is hired and begins work. These gaps are often manifestations of the differences between an organization’s documented culture and the actual culture that exists in the workplace.

As HR teams strive to reinforce the importance of person-centered care among employees at all levels, they may decide to use one or more of the following techniques:

1. **Utilize behavioral-based interviewing and evaluations.**
   The first step in patient satisfaction is hiring the right person. Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital in Elkin, North Carolina has adopted a peer interviewing process which leverages behavioral-based questions. Asking applicants about different situations and how they handled them in the past gives HR and hiring managers insight into how they will interact with patients. “HR is the function that can identify which candidates are driven by a need to serve others and will be committed to patient-centered care,” said Kathy Poteate, Interim HR Director at High Chatham Memorial Hospital.

2. **Conduct patient and resident interviews.** As organizations evaluate person-centered care, they should consider how they can incorporate the voices of patients and residents. By utilizing behavioral assessments, patients and residents can use the custom interview guide to evaluate candidates. One approach is to involve patients and residents in the hiring process. Another method is to evaluate patients’ and residents’ experiences with staff. While traditional satisfaction surveys are useful, it’s also good idea to explore other feedback mechanisms such as focus groups.

3. **Analyze HR processes.** HR teams should examine whether expectations about person-centered care are clearly communicated throughout the employee lifecycle, from recruiting and interviewing to onboarding and employee reviews. Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital, for example, has established the STARS (Service, Teamwork, Accountability, Respect, and Safe Care) standards of performance. Before candidates apply for a job, they must agree to these standards. The STARS standards are embedded in all aspects of employment at the hospital and are clearly communicated to the staff. “Organizations may have a service-excellence focus, but if it’s not communicated well, then it won’t be sufficient,” commented Tera Flippen, Employment Coordinator at Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital. “We communicate our ‘Pursuit of Excellence’ through the application process, performance reviews, standup meetings, and more.”

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The 2013 Healthcare HR Influence Survey was jointly sponsored by HealthcareSource and Planetree

With more than 2,000 healthcare clients, HealthcareSource is the leading provider of talent management software for the healthcare industry. The HealthcareSource Suite helps healthcare organizations acquire, develop, and retain the best workforce possible to reduce costs and improve patient or resident satisfaction and safety.

Planetree advocates for patients and residents, provides solutions for healthcare organizations, and sets the standard for excellence in patient-centered care. The Planetree network is a global community of acute care hospitals, continuing care communities, and outpatient clinics transforming healthcare by considering every aspect of care from the perspective of their patients and residents, and reconnecting staff to their passion for caring for others.
Almost half of respondents (46%) strongly agreed with this statement.

However, the job function represented by the most people who strongly agreed was recruiters (70%), while the job function with the fewest people who strongly agreed was RNs (34%).

This suggests a disconnect between HR’s strategic recruiting initiatives and how they are executed throughout the organization. It appears that people at various levels within organizations may not be on the same page. However, there are actions that HR can take to close these gaps and increase frontline focus on patient and resident satisfaction.

- **Design systems and processes that keep employees connected with their internal motivators.** Employees at Hallmark Health System, for instance, wrote the organization’s Standards of Achieving Excellence. These guidelines are written in simple language and many relate to the ways that employees interact with patients and their peers. The Standards of Achieving Excellence have been incorporated into the application and interview processes, as well as into onboarding and performance reviews. The standards increase employee engagement and help the organization deliver quality patient care on a consistent basis.

- **Reinforce behaviors and soft skills which are proven to affect the patient and resident experience.** The goal of person-centered care is to individualize care and honor each person’s preferences. Research has shown that when healthcare professionals communicate well and are responsive, patient and resident satisfaction increases. The key to person-centered care is how authentically the employee interacts with the patient or resident.

To help hardwire person-centered behaviors, both Hallmark Health System and Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital ask employees to follow the **AIDET acronym**. Staff are encouraged to:

- **Acknowledge** patients by smiling and saying hello
- **Introduce** themselves to patients
- **Discuss the duration** of procedures or other work that is done in patients’ rooms
- **Explain** the procedure or task they are doing
- **Thank** the patient for choosing the organization

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*Seeking Candidates Who Will Positively Affect Patient or Resident Satisfaction*

The second survey question asked whether respondents’ healthcare organizations have a strategic initiative related to hiring healthcare employees who will positively impact patient or resident satisfaction.
Evaluating Candidates’ Service-Excellence Competencies

The third question in the survey asked whether talent acquisition professionals at respondents’ healthcare organizations assess candidates’ “service-excellence competencies” (such as: compassion, active listening, and adaptability) during the hiring process.

More than one third of respondents (42%) agreed, but recruiters were most likely to strongly agree with this question and only 26% of executives believed that their talent acquisition teams are doing this.

Although recruiters shoulder considerable responsibility when it comes to performing assessments, it appears that they aren’t publicizing their efforts related to improving the patient or resident experience. Here are three tips for using behavioral assessments to promote person-centered care:

1. **Utilize structured behavioral assessments.**
   Formal behavioral assessments are useful because they offer an opportunity to align the content of interviews with the organizational culture. Some behavioral assessment software systems will generate customized interview guides based on applicants’ assessment results. Before implementing assessments, it’s a good idea to divide responsibilities for evaluating different competencies between HR and hiring managers.

2. **Incorporate assessment results into behavioral interviews.** Behavioral interviewing uses questions that help predict how candidates will perform on the job. For example, when searching for applicants who have a person-centered approach to care, it’s important to assess qualities like adaptability and openness to learning. When Hallmark Health System launched its behavioral interviewing initiative in 2009, the HR team along with hiring managers, first identified the required competencies for each job and then developed interview questions to evaluate areas like customer service, teamwork, and communication. Hallmark Health System also uses peer interviews in many of its departments. “Because teamwork is so important to our organization, peer interviewing is key,” said Hoffman. “We use peer interviews to ensure that candidates have the right customer service attitudes. When individuals exhibit high levels of service-excellence competencies, they tend to be better equipped to reach organizational goals related to person-centered care.”

3. **Correlate assessments with on-the-job performance to see whether HR processes can be improved.** It’s a good idea to track the performance of new hires who scored well on core service-excellence competencies. Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital uses service-related standards of performance to hire employees, as well as to evaluate them. Staff are expected to exceed customer expectations, smile and greet people in ways that are easily understood, and promote the health and well-being of all patients. HR teams that demonstrate a correlation between increased customer satisfaction and decreased employee turnover can easily illustrate the organizational value provided by their talent acquisition professionals.
The majority of respondents (87%) agreed or strongly agreed that their organization had service-excellence and patient or resident satisfaction related performance goals.

While directors of nursing strongly agreed with this question (65%), it’s interesting to note that fewer RNs strongly agreed (45%). This suggests a gap between leaders and frontline employees related to person-centered care related performance goals. There are several steps that organizations can take to address this issue.

- **Cultivate an atmosphere that values goals.** One effective approach is to create a service-excellence council comprised of frontline employees. This group should establish goals related to patient or resident satisfaction and monitor scores over time.

- **Set effective performance goals.** Individual department goals should align with broader organizational objectives. In addition, employee performance should be evaluated through SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals. Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital evaluates staff after they have been on the job for 90 days and then annually thereafter. Goals are either job-specific or tied to one of the organization’s five Pursuit of Excellence pillars (people, quality, service, financial, and growth).

- **Recognize success when employees reach their objectives.** It’s important to have a system that facilitates a consistent online dialogue between employees and managers. Open communication helps employees focus on positive behaviors. Accountability is based on an understanding of organizational goals, rather than on fear. Experience has shown that high levels of employee satisfaction translate into high levels of patient or resident satisfaction.

- **Track goals with a performance management system to ensure consistency and to embed goals into the organizational processes.** Hallmark Health System has embedded its Standards of Achieving Excellence into the employee evaluation process. Managers must indicate a minimum of three standards that each employee exhibited during the year. They must also identify standards where the employee needs improvement and work with staff to create action plans for improvement.
Educating and Training All Employees to Provide Person-Centered Care

The fifth question in the survey asked respondents whether everyone at their organizations, from top leadership to staff, has the educational resources they need to provide person-centered care and increase patient or resident satisfaction.

Three quarters of respondents (75%) either agreed or strongly agreed with this question.

Yet, directors of nursing were more likely than other roles to strongly agree.

In addition, a lot of healthcare education focuses on clinical training and nursing. However, it often tends to be compliance-based, rather than enhancing the skills needed to improve person-centered care. Hallmark Health System has taken steps to address this issue. “We have homegrown Service-Excellence Training which is tailored to the needs of each department and focuses on our Standards of Excellence,” said Hoffman. “One example is the cultural diversity training which focuses on patients, employees, and visitors.”

When organizations emphasize staff development, employees have a better sense of how their roles impact patients and residents. This is particularly important for Generation X employees who want to be engaged in work that makes a difference. Generation Xers value coaching and mentoring. It motivates them to own their work and to feel personally responsible for patient and resident outcomes. Middle managers also need to be nurtured. They are responsible for ensuring that the culture rewards staff for being impactful.

Technology is a proven way to enhance employees’ educational experience. Learning management systems enable organizations to track, create, and implement engaging education that is individualized for each employee. Both Hallmark Health System and Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital use HealthcareSource NetLearning for competency-based training. “We have found that NetLearning is a more flexible way to deliver education,” said Poteate. “We used to use classroom training at Hugh Chatham, but it was difficult to manage in a 24/7 healthcare setting.”

Unfortunately, in times of budget strain, employee education is often the first expense to be decreased. “It’s important to remember, though, that sometimes the easiest things to save money on—like employee education—are also the hardest to live without when we think of success for the organization as a whole,” Kinsey commented.
Using Technology to Promote Person-Centered Best Practices

The final survey question asked respondents whether their HR departments (including Learning and Development) utilize talent and learning management technology to ensure person-centered best practices are adhered to throughout the organization.

Close to one third of participants (31%) had a neutral response or disagreed that their organizations had technology in place to support person-centered care.

Among the respondents who strongly agreed, only 31% were in employee education.

Technology can play a central role in empowering employees to provide patient and resident-centered care. Learning management systems provide employees a way to easily access learning materials and to track their own training and credentials. This allows learners to be responsible for their own success. Technology can also make training more engaging. Employees have the flexibility to integrate online learning into their schedules when it’s most convenient for them. A best practice is to make education available to staff in real-time and at employees’ fingertips. Technology allows that to happen and supports how younger generations learn. The more educational resources an employer can provide, the more likely that staff will work in ways that translate into a positive patient or resident experience.

Conclusion

Person-centered care represents the future of healthcare, as acute care and long-term care organizations strive to provide services that meet their customers’ needs. It’s important to recognize that the path to patient and resident satisfaction begins as soon as candidates apply for a position. HR can play an instrumental role in promoting person-centered care by identifying and hiring individuals who are committed to serving others, emphasizing patient or resident satisfaction in the employee evaluation process, and by cultivating a learning culture that values customer satisfaction.

To learn about the latest HR strategies and trends in healthcare, read our Healthcare Talent Management Blog.
About HealthcareSource

With more than 2,000 healthcare clients, HealthcareSource is the leading provider of talent management software for the healthcare industry. The HealthcareSource Quality Talent Suite™ helps healthcare organizations acquire, develop and retain the best workforce possible, in order to improve the patient and resident experience. The company’s cloud-based talent management solutions include applicant tracking, behavioral assessments, reference checking, employee performance, compensation, competency and learning management and e-Learning courseware. A private company focused exclusively on the healthcare industry, HealthcareSource consistently earns high marks for client satisfaction and retention. KLAS Research recently named HealthcareSource a category leader for Talent Management for the third consecutive year, in addition to recognition from Modern Healthcare’s “Healthcare’s Hottest,” Inc. 500|5000 and Deloitte Technology Fast 500.

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