

6 steps to improve patients' experience in your organization

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As the health care industry shifts toward value-based care, optimizing the patient experience and improving health outcomes are getting more emphasis. Meanwhile, more patients are recognizing the power of active participation in shared-decision making. To exceed patient expectations and improve care, organizations should take a comprehensive approach to their patient-experience program that includes providing communication training to staff and leveraging transparent feedback from stakeholders.

Physicians, care teams, and system leaders, can learn more about creating a patient-experience program through a new AMA STEPS Forward™ module. This free online module provides physicians with six steps for creating a successful patient-experience program within their organization.

Assess the here and now

Physician practices should begin by looking at the current state of patient satisfaction in their practices. To collect patient feedback, physicians and their team members can offer patient-satisfaction surveys. This creates an opportunity for patients to share their feedback anonymously and can be used to make improvements within the practice.

Another option for evaluating patient satisfaction is to enlist members of the health care team to have brief, casual conversations with patients during their visit. Team members can ask patients about their visit and whether they have any feedback for the physician or staff. These questions can be asked on the walk from the exam room, at the checkout or at any point that a team member interacts with a patient after their visit.

Define a “North Star.” Physicians and their teams should characterize their “North Star”—the ideal patient experience and outline goals for the program. To help in defining the guiding principles of the program, many practices turn toward their mission or vision statement. In doing this, physicians

should gather and discuss the perspectives of team members, patients and caregivers.

Engage key stakeholders. A relationship-centered program requires a culture that includes teamwork, integration, good communication and an environment that is supportive of continuous learning, according to the module. To create this, teams should incorporate feedback from everyone—even the patients.

Results from the initial assessment of the current state of patient satisfaction should be shared with the entire team and patients. By incorporating patients, teams can gain a unique perspective that might often get overlooked while the staff is focused on their work. There isn't just one ideal patient-experience program. Different organizations and patient populations will have varying preferences, expectations and understandings.

Develop, implement strategy. The entire team should meet to determine which processes or changes to begin implementing. To ensure success, the module suggests starting small and picking an option that is sustainable and scalable.

Physicians and their teams might consider:

- | Creating a patient and family advisory council.
- | Instituting regular leadership “rounding” to speak with patients, families and caregivers about their experiences.
- | Making improvement in employee engagement a priority.
- | Implementing service-excellence training for employees and all levels.
- | Teaching effective and empathic communication.

Determine impact. With a patient-experience program in place, organizations should continue to measure the success of the strategy. This can include the use of more patient-satisfaction surveys. It might not be feasible to quantify all parts of the patient-experience program, but qualitative input can be just as valuable such as looking at trends in the comments sections of the surveys.

Improve over time. By making the patient-experience program a key discussion topic in team meetings, it will remain valuable to the entire team. In these meetings, it is important to ask for employee feedback and suggestions for improvement and enhancement. Physicians should also regularly share positive notes and celebrate team members' success.

The module may be completed for continuing medical education credit. The AMA's STEPS Forward collection features 49 practice-improvement modules. Several come thanks to a grant from, and in collaboration with, the Transforming Clinical Practices Initiative (TCPI).

By bringing the unique STEPS Forward strategic resources on practice transformation to the practice

transformation networks (PTNs) and their enrolled practices in TCPI, the AMA can accelerate the pace of transformation and spread it beyond clinicians. The AMA develops planned demonstrations with PTNs on focused parts of the change package and through these efforts can show what advanced transformation looks like in practice.

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