



Richard Liebowitz, MD

# Putting Patients First

*Helping patients make care decisions through education.*

For New York-Presbyterian Hospital (NYP), putting patients first is not just a motto, it is a way of life. Since 1998 when New York Hospital and Presbyterian Hospital merged to create NYP, improving the patient experience has been its first priority. The hospital strives to provide the highest quality, safest and most compassionate care to its patients. The theme “We Put Patients First” is a key part of its 2007 strategic plan, and to accomplish this goal the hospital has embarked on several initiatives.

## Multimedia Programs Help

**Educate:** To meet the needs of patients who have asked for more information about their care, NYP partnered with a technology company, Emmi Solutions, to provide multimedia programs that enforce the message to patients that they are an important part of the healthcare team and an active participant in their own treatment. The programs are an innovative way to engage, educate and empower patients in addition to positively impacting their own care. These programs help patients better understand upcoming procedures and better manage chronic care conditions.

NYP began using these multimedia programs after research showed that most patients retain only 20 percent

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*We believe it was important for patients to see where the system ranked against other healthcare organizations regarding patient satisfaction.*  
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of the information they hear during physician consultations. The programs allow patients to retain more information because they can view these programs multiple times in addition to sharing them with their caregivers.

For example, the Department of Surgery has programs on several procedures such as gastric bypass, coronary artery bypass, plastic surgery, total hip replacement and parathyroidectomy, among others. Created by an expert panel of medical advisors and based on scientific research, national clinical guidelines and direct patient feedback, each program runs about 20 minutes.

The program includes an anatomy lesson, a description of the condition/disease and a step-by-step

explanation of the surgical procedure. It also includes preoperative instructions, recovery information, and information on risks/benefits and other alternative therapies.

Patients are able to advance at their own rate, and there is a notepad function that allows them to jot down any questions that may come up along the way. They can access these programs from their home, hospital, physician’s office or other remote location through confidential access codes via the Internet.

NYP has found that the patients who view these programs experience increased satisfaction, more confidence in their physicians and more comfort with their upcoming procedures.

The chart on page 43 shows results of a survey that is presented to patients upon completion of a given program.

**Service Recovery:** Service recovery is an important tool to ensure high patient satisfaction. NYP staff have been empowered to “make things right” for patients who are not satisfied with some aspect of service or care. The organization promotes proactive service recovery by trying to fix problems as soon as they come to light. In addition, most patients receive a phone call after discharge to confirm their satisfaction with NYP’s service and care.

Patients Stated NYP Multimedia Programs Make a Difference	Percentage of Respondents
Improved their understanding of what to expect	94
Provided new information about their procedure	85
Made them more comfortable about their upcoming procedure	85
Increased confidence in their doctor	80
Covered risks that they didn't know about previously	80
Gave them a better understanding of how to take care of themselves before/after their procedure	86
Answered questions they planned to call their doctor to discuss	80

**The Planetree Model of Patient Care:** Several departments within NYP have embraced the philosophy put forth by Planetree, a nonprofit organization based in Derby, Conn., that promotes the development and implementation of innovative models of healthcare focusing on healing and nurturing body, mind and spirit.

To create a healing environment, the Planetree model focuses on human interaction, recognizing that the provision of healthcare consists of human beings caring for other human beings. The approach appreciates the importance of family and friends—and their contribution to the quality of the hospital experience—by promoting caring connections between the patients and their support systems.

As noted by our experiences with the multimedia programs, the Planetree model emphasizes the need to provide patients, families and community members access to meaningful information and education.

The Planetree approach also tries to improve the overall patient experience by addressing food, design, entertainment, spirituality and other critical issues. In regard to food, the model goes beyond providing nutritional and nurturing sustenance by offering choices and personalized service in combination with sound nutrition practices that add pleasure, comfort and familiarity.

To help enhance the clinical environment, the Planetree approach provides arts and entertainment such as music, artwork, theater, crafts and clowns for patient engagement and enjoyment. In addition, the model recognizes the vital role of spirituality in healing the whole person. From chaplains to meditation programs, hospitals can provide opportunities for reflection and support of spiritual needs.

Further, it also stresses the importance of using human touch to reduce anxiety, pain and stress, benefiting patients, families and staff members. The model also subscribes to the philosophy that

complementary therapies should be offered in addition to clinical modalities of care. Examples of these alternatives include aroma and pet therapy, acupuncture and Reiki (a Japanese technique for stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes healing).

**Commitment to Care Retreats:** NYP has looked very carefully at best practices for improving patient satisfaction across the country. Hospitals that have reached the 90th percentile for patient satisfaction have all created service expectations and training programs based on those expectations for staff. To improve the patient experience, NYP implemented the Commitment to Care philosophy.

Commitment to Care is a set of service expectations for all staff to follow in their work and interaction with patients, families and colleagues. The expectations are based on feedback that comes directly from patients and address their key priorities and needs. It was created to give employees clarity about what is expected of them and a clear set of standards by which to evaluate and recognize staff for issues related to service.

NYP has created sessions that go beyond training to more of a “retreat” approach. The goal of the retreat is not only to create an understanding of the expectations, but to have an opportunity for staff to see and embrace their unique role in the care process and make a personal commitment to providing caring and compassionate service to patients and families.

These retreats are full-day experiences and allow staff to delve deeper into many issues that are related to service and the “We Put Patients First” effort. The retreats are meant to help staff understand their role in helping create healing environments; the need/purpose/results of patient satisfaction surveys; and the importance of excellent, compassionate service. Finally, the retreats help staff reconnect with why they got into the healthcare field in the first place.

**Metrics/Transparency:** We need to make sure that we are effective in providing care under these categories so we can report this information to our patients. Metrics are an important tool for

both the hospital and for our patients. For patients, metrics allow objective and meaningful comparisons of hospitals on topics that are important to consumers; for the hospital, public reporting of the survey results creates new incentives to improve quality of care and an opportunity to see if the organization is meeting its care objectives.

Further, public reporting serves to enhance public accountability in healthcare by increasing the transparency of the quality of hospital care—a goal that is important to NYP, as it allows the hospital to be open about where it performs well and to see where it needs to do better.

NYP’s commitment to transparency cannot be more apparent since we have chosen to allow the publication of our patient satisfaction scores as part of Medicare’s HCAHPS (Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems) Web site. Hospitals have the option of not making these scores available to the general public, an option that NYP has rejected. Our organization believes it is important for patients to see where the system ranked against other healthcare organizations regarding patient satisfaction. ▲

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