

fastfacts

Resources for Nursing Home Professionals

Making Residents & Families the Top Priority

Customer service is the foundation of a resident-centered nursing home. It is the degree to which care is responsive to, and driven by, resident preferences, expectations, and values. Raising the bar on customer service is critical to remaining competitive and it increases resident and family satisfaction. This FastFacts focuses on helping leaders and staff members foster excellent customer service in nursing homes.

Make Excellent Service a Priority

- **Commit to exceptional customer service.** First and foremost, staff will treat the residents and their families only as well as they are treated by you and your leadership team. Therefore, staff satisfaction and morale are critical to success and a key priority.
- **Educate your staff to always be friendly, helpful, courteous, and knowledgeable.** An exceptional service vision supported by specific examples must be developed by a multidisciplinary team and communicated to all members of the organization. Teach staff about responsiveness and customer service using active learning tools such as role-player and skits. Be clear on expectations.
- **Implement consistent staff assignment.** Staff should care for the same group of residents. Encourage staff to learn about the residents' needs, wants, and expectations.
- **Conduct ongoing resident and family member customer service satisfaction surveys.** Satisfaction surveys can provide management and staff with valuable input for quality improvement, strategic planning, and decision-making. Involve your residents, their family members, and staff in developing an action plan based on the satisfaction survey results.
- **Establish a culture of responsiveness by encouraging all staff to never walk by a resident calling for assistance or a call-light that is ringing.** Often, any employee can take care of the residents' request. Reward and recognize staff for answering call-lights. Residents' perception of customer service is associated with prompt responses to needs, efficiency of care, positive staff attitudes, and open communication.
- **Increase response time to residents and their family members who are standing at the nursing station waiting for assistance.** Train your staff to respond quickly by making eye contact, smiling, and offering assistance. Hire a friendly and efficient ward clerk to take pressure off of the nurses and enhance customer service.
- **Develop customer service guidelines.** Facilities should develop specific service processes and scripts for certain situations such as welcoming new residents, responding to common questions, answering phones, and responding to complaints.
- **Prioritize customer service goals based on the results of satisfaction surveys.** Choose one goal per month. Focusing your customer service improvement effort on only one goal at a time (e.g., decreasing response time or handling complaints more effectively) prevents staff from feeling overwhelmed.
- **Offer education to staff regarding the essentials of effective communication.** These include making eye contact, using positive body language, listening to complaints, acknowledging emotions, maintaining a positive attitude, being a team player, and recognizing escalating behaviors.

Involve Resident Family Members

- **Establish a line of family communication from the first day a loved one is admitted.** In the admissions process, make clear that when the family is concerned about something, they are welcome to come and talk with the administrator. Maintain a close connection with the family by remembering their names and visitation patterns.
- **Remember how family members judge a nursing home.** Families perceive that the facility's staff provides excellent care when friendly, dependable, and timely services are provided to their loved ones. If a mistake is made, admit it and offer an apology in addition to a plan to address the issue.
- **Assist families and guests in all stages of the nursing home process.** Better preparation and support from nursing home personnel can be very helpful during the waiting process, preparation to move, admission, and living in a nursing home.

Making Residents & Families the Top Priority

- **Educate family members and residents about the difference between hospitals and nursing homes.** Residents and family expectations may be unreasonable related to staffing levels, availability of physicians on site, or some behaviors of other residents. Managing family expectations and ensuring families understand the realities of life in a nursing home results in increased awareness and reduced litigation.
- **Conduct care conferences during a convenient time for family members.** Families and residents generally find care conferences useful experiences for sharing information, setting reasonable goals, and providing emotional support.
- **Establish family councils.** As volunteers, families can be a part of a facility and contribute to the quality of residents' care. Councils are forums for families to voice their complaints, develop action plans, and support the staff.
- **Sponsor educational and community events that involve residents, families, and guests.** The celebration of anniversaries, cultural events, and holidays foster a community environment and enhance family participation.
- **Make family members and guests feel at home.** Provide family members and guests with opportunities to offer emotional and spiritual support to their loved ones.

What Matters Most to Families

1. Competent staff
2. Staff cares about resident
3. How nurses provide care
4. Choices and preferences met
5. Management responsiveness
6. How nursing assistants provide care
7. Resident treated with respect
8. Adequate number of staff
9. Safe facility for resident
10. Friendships with staff

References

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Web links

- End of Life Educational Resource Center (EPERC)
www.eperc.mcw.edu
- Provider Magazine www.providermagazine.com
- My InnerView www.myinnerview.com

What Matters Most to Employees

1. Management cares
2. Management listens
3. Staff receive help with job stress
4. Workplace is safe
5. Supervisor cares
6. Supervisor shows appreciation
7. Supervisor provides information

Source: SNF family and employee satisfaction surveys conducted in 2004 in 26 states; published in My InnerView, 9/2005.

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