

The Pursuit of Nurse Happiness

By: Dave Geenens, President/CEO Avascend Healthcare Hospitality

In every enterprise, there is a person or group of people, that if they are not happy, the world around them is cast in a hue of gray. Skilled doctors are the life-blood of a hospital and serving them well is critical for physician recruiting and retention. Effort should always be taken to provide extra care for these mission-critical assets of a hospital.

Ultimately, though, it is the nursing and clinical staff that better dictate the color and energy of the environment in which care is given to patients. If the nurses and clinicians aren't happy, then response times can suffer, valuable productive time can be spent commiserating with other nurses, and spontaneous opportunities to smile and greet others warmly are missed. Nurses will do their clinical jobs, but will refrain from doing some of the warm, human behaviors that can render a patient or guest's experience excellent. On the other hand, if the nurses are happy, doctors' spirits are brightened, patients are served better, caring takes on more of a holistic feel, and the balance of the hospital staff will find work more enjoyable.

In a case study recently published by Press-Ganey, Hudson Valley Hospital Center in New York reported significant improvements, not only in employee satisfaction, their target for changes, but in top line revenue and net profits. Prior to focusing on employee satisfaction, the hospital was losing almost \$2 million per year.



But after conducting employee surveys and responding with improvements, the hospital has grown its top line from \$38 million to \$105 million and been able to sustain a 6-7% net profit the last several years. Can all this be attributed to employee satisfaction? Probably not, but to believe employee satisfaction does not make a significant difference is a huge mistake.

It is your employee's competency and commitment to the work that has the biggest impact on the experience and perceptions of your patients and guests. As this case study validates, employee satisfaction must be a top priority.

I have always believed that a productive worker is a happy worker and not vice versa. This belief has served me well in leadership. If it is true, then how can nurses and clinicians be more productive, resulting in happier people? Let's take a wide-angle view of a nurse's or clinician's day and activities to explore this solution. By the way, the means to improving nurse and clinician productivity and increasing their resulting happiness, often serve doctors in similar ways, allowing a hospital to get an extra boost in morale. Look at some of these not-so-traditional ways that a hospital can improve employee satisfaction.

Concierge Service

The well-documented nursing shortage in hospitals has placed a heavy burden on the nurses left to care for patients in hospitals. The twelve-hour shifts and tireless schedules can create days during a week where nurses are worried about minor errands or things they forgot to do when they hurriedly left the house. A concierge service to take care of periodic errands that are difficult to squeeze in during work days can be a huge relief to nurses. These errands can include dropping off and picking up dry cleaning, automobile servicing (including oil changes, washing, and tire rotations), ticket purchasing for movies or concerts in the area, dinner reservations, buying postage stamps, mailing packages, among other things of value to

the nursing staff. This service has proven to be a significant employee benefit and retention tool in many hospitals. Doctors, patients and guests can also use this valuable service.

Professional Internal Patient Transport and EVS

While at work, nurses like to be fully utilized, doing things they were trained and educated to do. Yet short-staffing of nurses and under-performing internal patient transport and EVS services can force nurses into performing tasks that are better done by someone more appropriately paid and trained to do the transport and infection-control tasks. Out-sourcing these services to a company who specializes in transporting and infection control can free up nurses to do the things they do best. This can create a significant increase in nurse satisfaction, improve retention, and reduce nurse turnover.

Branded Retail Food

Meal and snack times for hospital staffs are often a demotivator. Traditional institutional food services or cafeterias simply do not provide the type of food or environments that employees and guests look upon as inviting and warm; serving quality food. There is a significant move in the marketplace toward branded, familiar foods like Starbucks and Subway. We have seen employee morale spike at the opening of a Starbucks in the lobby of a hospital. Many staff members drive-through a Starbucks on the way to work. How much more would they enjoy a Starbucks in their building?! Doctors, nurses and guests will love the valuable, inviting, and warm experience.

Staying in front of nurse productivity and satisfaction is important in today's healthcare marketplace. Efforts to organize nurses and service workers continue to gain steam. Waiting for these efforts to spawn, then react, is not wise. Do things now that will increase the productivity and job satisfaction of your nursing and clinician staff. The increased retention and lower turnover will reduce recruiting and training costs. The more productive staff will be happier, generating increases in morale. Higher morale creates an exponential impact on the efficiency of the hospital enterprise.

I have learned this in my experience leading others. When morale is low, everything is an issue. Even

the slightest pain or frustration is magnified. When morale is high, nothing is an issue. Small bumps or bruises are viewed as what they are; small. Changing the hospital work environment and adding new employee-friendly services is one way to increase morale and ride the wave of good will sure to follow. There is great benefit in keeping your nurses and clinical staff happy.

Improving patient flow while increasing patient satisfaction.

For more than 20 years, Avascend has been a leader in logistical solutions and superior guest services. Our passion for serving others, our hospitality experience, and our strong operational infrastructure provide the foundation for serving over 120 hospitals from Alaska to Florida through our more than 1,100 employees.

Avascend is the first and best "healthcare hospitality" company in the country. Unlike others who specialize in the back-of-the-house functions like food service or environmental services and unlike other companies who started in the parking business, Avascend has always believed that parking and logistics is ultimately about people. Avascend is what might be referred to as a front-of-the-house company; focused on not just patient flow and logistics, but the total patient, guest, employee, and physician experience.

A patient's or visitor's perception of a hospital is directly affected by, not only the medical professionals at the hospital, but by the line staff. Avascend puts people trained in providing extraordinary customer service in these front, line staff positions to improve the patient and visitor experience at your hospital. Our healthcare hospitality services, from valet parking to branded food retail services, are designed to support patients and visitors during a time when assistance is most valuable, allowing them to focus on their health and the health and experience of their loved ones.

Avascend specializes in creating a lasting, positive impression for the customers and employees of our healthcare clients. The result is a measurable increase in patient flow, improved patient satisfaction, and better retention of healthcare professionals.