

How does your security impact patient, employee, and visitor satisfaction?

By Ann Geissler Timme, Allegion

It is often said “people do not shop where they do not feel safe”. In many ways, healthcare consumers are no different. Although often directed to a specific facility by physician recommendation or health insurance constraints, many times the healthcare consumer does have a choice.

Certainly, trust is vital to any relationship. When patients enter our facilities they expect that their medical care will be performed in a professional and safe manner. They also expect that the healthcare facility will take reasonable and appropriate steps to provide a physically safe environment for them, their property and private information, their family and their visitors.

Patient satisfaction

Call it a relationship, call it customer satisfaction. Whatever words you choose, patients can and do define their trust in a healthcare facility based on multiple factors. It is important to recognize that the “patient experience” does not just happen. In fact, it can, and should be created. Even before the patient arrives at the hospital they begin to form an impression of the quality of the institution. Are neighboring streets filled with litter, have houses with bars on the windows, and gang graffiti on buildings? If these and other signs of social disorder are present how good might their care be?

And what about the patient’s perception while in the hospital. Are hallways clear of clutter? Are public and private restrooms clean and stocked? Is there a presence of security such as security guards or up-to-date locks and access control equipment? Do doors close properly and operate quietly? Are parking and other public areas well lit? Understanding how consumers feel about your organization and developing metrics designed to measure and improve perceptions can have a significant impact. In addition to reviewing antidotal information and security incident reports, more and more healthcare providers are asking patients to express their feelings in surveys such as those from Press Ganey Associates and NBRI.

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Patients arrive at healthcare facilities for any number of reasons. The birth of a baby, elective surgery, illness, medical condition, accident, death of a family member or friend, medical emergency, and many other conditions bring them into our facilities. In many areas of the country the emergency department is seen as the new front door to the hospital. Often more than 50% of hospital inpatients were admitted to the facility through an emergency department visit. Although designed to be a place for emergency care, the emergency department often finds itself as a refuge for the homeless, a hiding place for the fearful, an entry point for visitors trying to sneak in after hours, and a clinic for those individuals who cannot afford to see a private doctor. These non-emergency uses create a special set of circumstances for security departments and place an enormous burden on healthcare providers.

Understanding why healthcare consumers chose or reject a particular institution is becoming ever more important. Perspective patients gather information from multiple sources including local newspapers, outcomes and cost databases, their insurance company, and many other resources. Healthcare institutions that have had multiple or significant criminal incidents may find it difficult to overcome these stories and re-shape perceptions.

Visitor satisfaction

One of the most important things to understand about visitors is that they, more often than not, have been the patient before or will be in the future. Not only are visitors supporting their loved ones through their stay at your healthcare facility, but they are also subconsciously inspecting the facility as they visit. Visitors will find cause for concern if equipment that looks important is unattended or if the hardware they use - doors, latches, buttons - are faulty or in disrepair. And if a visitor is given unfettered access they may perceive the facility as an uncontrolled environment. Visitors will do a thorough inspection to not only reaffirm that their loved one is safe but also to be reassured that if the occasion arises and they themselves become patients, that their needs will be fulfilled and that they, too, will have a safe and secure experience.

Sometimes however, visitors also probe for weaknesses so they can take advantage of them either during their visit or later. Ensuring policies and procedures are working and are being fairly enforced, that security technology is fully functional, and that security staff is visible and professional can help reduce the potential for both rule violations and criminal incidents.

Employee satisfaction

Safety and security in a healthcare facility is not only important for the wellbeing of its patients, but also the employees that deliver the life saving care. Healthcare providers are in physically demanding and stressful roles that require a safe and secure environment to perform. Unfortunately, the healthcare workplace is no stranger to violence. It has been reported that over half of emergency nurses report physical violence on the job. Adopting and implementing the correct policies, along with technology to help control access and maintain surveillance can help protect any organizations most valuable asset, their employees.

No matter how well qualified your people, how state-of-the-art your equipment or how beautiful your facility, your employees sense of security and that of their patients' can help create a satisfying work environment that does more to delivering positive patient outcomes than you can measure.

The synergy of the environment

Maintaining healthy relationships with each individual stakeholder in your facility is a difficult, but important task. A healthy facility functions only so well as the ability of these groups to work in concert with each other. If patients, visitors, and employees continue to feel safe and secure, they will better to be able to work with one another.

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Learn more about perceptions of security

Allegion can help you choose and implement a variety of safety and security hardware that can help you and your staff maintain security, while also creating an accessible and comfortable environment for patients and visitors. Contact a professional security consultant in your area by calling **888.758.9823** or fill out the **Contact Us** form on our website at allegion.com.

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