

# Client Impact Story

## Language of Caring at Southeastern Health



### The Challenge

Before Southeastern Health began its partnership with Language of Caring, they had engaged the Studer Group for eight years to help them transform the patient experience. After significant strides, leaders felt that they hit a wall with their CAHPS scores and quality metrics, and they saw an increase in patient grievances as well. Leaders decided to take action to break through that wall to achieve further improvement in the patient and family experience. Also, recognizing that employee engagement is a powerful driver of a positive patient experience, they sought to strengthen engagement, collaboration and teamwork.

After researching best practices, talking with patient experience professionals at the Patient Experience Conference 2017, and attending the Language of Caring Webinar (“Words That Transform the Patient Experience”), Southeastern identified as the missing element in their strategy—*building skills for communicating with compassion and caring*. They recognized the need to give much greater attention to “the HOW”—how people communicate with patients, families and coworkers.

### The Strategy

Southeastern decided to partner with Language of Caring to help them transform how people throughout their organization communicate—with an emphasis on communication skills that show empathy and compassion, relieve suffering, and reduce anxiety.

President and CEO Joann Anderson conveyed her strong commitment and provided leadership support throughout the process. Following initial planning between Language of Caring and key stakeholders, all executives, managers, directors, and coordinators engaged in a Leadership Kickoff. This dynamic two-day event inspired leaders to demonstrate the core competencies and built a powerful foundation for ongoing engagement and commitment. The Language of Caring team then trained leaders to facilitate a mandatory “Jumpstart” workshop for all employees, and this team of facilitators inspired and engaged employees throughout the system with the goals, skills and tactics for Language of Caring.

With a positive buzz around the *Language of Caring for Staff* program flowing throughout the organization, a few months later, the Physician Leadership Team confirmed their enthusiasm and support and took steps to implement the *Language of Caring for Physicians* with the entire medical staff, including residents. They began with a network meeting in which two seasoned, well-respected physician champions (a hospitalist and a physician network leader) engaged physicians and residents in dialogue about the power of communicating with empathy.

According to Alisia Oxendine, Director Guest Services who has spearheaded Language of Caring, “Providers led the discussion, emphasizing that we want an open dialogue with our providers about how we can help them better connect emotionally with patients and families, communicate in ways that reduce anxiety and suffering, achieve better patient outcomes, and strengthen patient loyalty.” Embracing the approach and its goals, the medical staff committed to implement *Language of Caring for Physicians*, and they have been implementing the skill modules—one skill at a time, over a period of months.

Leaders have supported and advanced their goals by engaging employees in “Habit-Building” activities and also through the frequent and creative sharing of stories that make appreciation, acknowledgement of successes, and celebration an everyday event. Says Ms. Oxendine, “I’m motivated and inspired by appreciation.” Part of our objective with Language of Caring is to help employees use the skills to strengthen teamwork and camaraderie. Patients see and know when there’s a healthy environment—when care is **coordinated** and people are talking to each other with respect and caring (patient experience is correlated with employee satisfaction). We really emphasize the stories about employees and providers who go above and beyond. We celebrate stories on communication boards and at award breakfasts, and highlight Language of Caring stories in meetings. Language of Caring is the fuel; it helps us acknowledge good deeds and caring acts. Language of Caring is a reminder that we have to care first... take care of each other first. When we take care of each other, then we have more to give to patients and families. And this feeds our professional pride and personal gratification.”

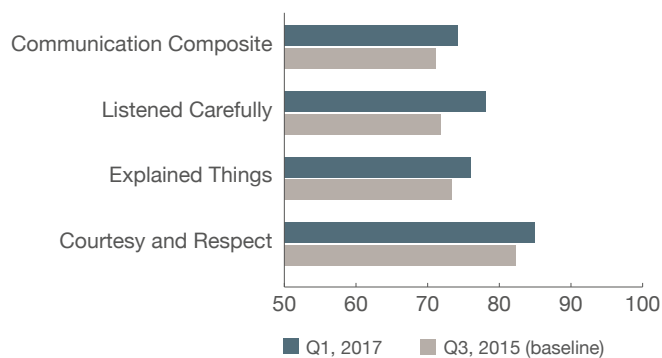
## Outcomes

The results are exciting and palpable. According to Ms. Oxendine, “We bear witness to our patients’ suffering and we show them we care. And we see patients respond in a positive manner, feeling better, engaging more, and adhering better in their self-care. They know all of us have their best interests at heart. We ARE a more caring organization; people are kinder, gentler, more understanding and collaborative. It has even changed how we preface our emails.”

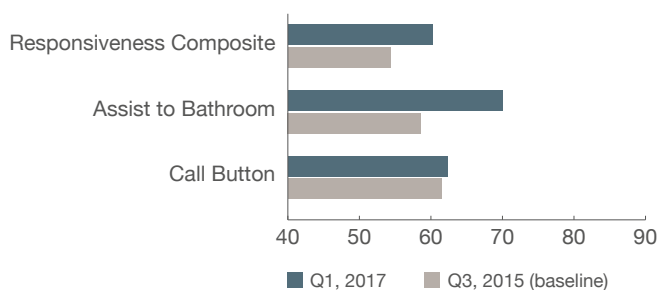
Most exciting has been a 50% decrease in the **grievance rate** in the Emergency Department, where leaders have fully embraced Language of Caring and have stepped forward to facilitate the process with their entire team and to use Language of Caring personally to build their relationships with providers and encourage mutual support and collaboration.

In terms of CAHPS scores, clinics have shown a startling 25–30% improvement. On the inpatient side, scores have had ups and downs, but there has been overall improvement that they are working hard to achieve further.

### Southeastern Regional Medical Center HCAHPS Top Box Results: Nurse Communication HealthStream Reporting



### Southeastern Regional Medical Center HCAHPS Top Box Results: Staff Responsiveness HealthStream Reporting



And most recently, as of July 2017 when compared with October 2016:

- The “Global Rating” moved from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile.
- The top-box score for Nurse Communication increased from 76.7 to 86.6, pushing performance to the 91<sup>st</sup> percentile.
- Also, the top-box score for Provider Communication increased from 79.37 to 80.9 pushing performance over the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in the Press Ganey database.

According to Ms. Oxendine, engagement scores have also improved because Language of Caring has helped people connect to their caring purpose, making their work more than just a job—and inspiring discretionary effort. Also, providers have remained engaged because they see the positive impact of communication on their relationships with patients, patient adherence, a decrease in hospital-acquired infections, fewer readmissions, shorter lengths of stay, financial performance and their feeling of personal gratification from practicing medicine.

## About Southeastern Health

Southeastern Health, a non-profit organization, is a comprehensive health care system which offers a wide array of health care services through its affiliated divisions. Southeastern Health is licensed for 452 beds and includes Southeastern Regional Medical Center, a DNV GL—Healthcare accredited hospital which offers a combination of acute care, intensive care and psychiatric services to more than 16,000 inpatients and 65,000 emergency patients annually. The medical center is licensed for 292 general acute care beds and 33 psychiatry beds. WoodHaven Nursing, Alzheimer’s and Rehabilitation Center is licensed for 115 beds and Southeastern Hospice House is licensed for 12 beds.

Southeastern Health’s Mission is to provide quality regional health care in a safe, compassionate and efficient environment. Their vision is to be the health system of choice by advancing the health of our communities through partnerships, learning, and providing high quality and compassionate care.

### Connect with us!

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