



HeartBeat

ON THE QUALITY PATIENT EXPERIENCE™

Insights, tips, tools and resources to help you achieve the unparalleled patient, family and employee experience

RESHAPING
THE CULTURE
OF CARE



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"EIGHT YEARS LATER AND WE'RE GOING STRONG."
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Soapbox: "Eight years later and we're going strong."

Wendy Leebov, Ed.D., SVP Program Development
Language of Caring, Branch of Planetree International

"Eight years later and we're going strong." This comment by Brenda Tiefenthaler from Spencer Hospital in Iowa was music to my ears. So are the comments, such as this from a Spencer patient:



"When we got home from Mayo, I telephoned the Abben Cancer Center and the first person I talked to was one of the nurses, Pam Altenhofen. At this point, I wasn't in the best shape emotionally. Pam must have sensed my mental state because she was very comforting and caring, very knowledgeable and made me feel at ease from the beginning. At this point I knew I had made the right choice with Spencer Hospital's Abben Cancer."

Chuck Buske, patient with 1-hour drive

Or comments such as this from a staff member:

"During college, I had a clinical rotation with Spencer Hospital Community Health Services and was impressed with how friendly everyone was and how well various departments work together. When I graduated from Dordt College, I went online and compared the area hospitals on patient satisfaction, clinical outcomes, patient comments and other statistics, and I really liked what I saw on Spencer. Plus, during the interview I learned about the strength of the hospital and its programs that focus on the patient's care and experience."

Micah Vande Vegte, RN Med/Surg

Spencer Hospital is a small rural hospital with an average daily census of 25 patients, 111 outpatient registrations per day, 509 employees and 41 active medical staff members.

iVantage Analytics has rated Spencer a **Top 100 Rural and Community Hospital** for the fourth consecutive year. 55% of Spencer Hospital's team live in Clay County and most others commute from adjoining counties. Some travel even further and a few work remotely.

“While Language of Caring is central to their strategy, these leaders are EXPERTS on sustainment.”

Fast Facts about Rural Health Care: Did you know?

- **Massive numbers of Americans rely on rural health care.** More than 18% of the U.S. population live in rural areas. More than 50 million rural Americans depend on their local hospital or health system as a very important source of care as well as a critical component of their area’s economic and social fabric. More than 12% of all hospitalizations are in rural hospitals annually. People in rural areas have much less access to healthcare than their urban counterparts.
- **Rural providers face difficult obstacles:**
 - Financial constraints and a high percentage of uninsured people
 - Severe physician shortages (When physicians leave, replacing them can take months or even years.)
 - Difficulty recruiting staff, especially in nursing
 - Losing patients due to competition with better equipped and more prestigious hospitals further away
 - Diverse patients with complex health needs and limited resources

Rural hospitals work hard to attract and retain patients, provide top-notch care across the continuum, and thrive financially—all requirements for keeping their doors open.

Distinguishing Spencer by Its Culture of Caring

Since 2011, with the unflagging commitment and support of their president Bill Bumgarner and the vision, passion and perseverance of Brenda Tiefenthaler, the Spencer folks have been working hard to establish and sustain a culture of caring that benefits patients, families, staff and their entire community. It started in 2011 and they are still at it!

I had the pleasure of interviewing Brenda Tiefenthaler, Spencer’s VP of Patient Care Services and Informatics and Candace Daniels, HR Generalist, to get an update on their caring culture strategies and results and to learn from them about the challenge of sustainment.

As we talked, I realized that while Language of Caring is central to their strategy, these leaders are EXPERTS on sustainment and making change stick long-term. Whether you’re revamping hourly rounding, or implementing LEAN, or carrying out a patient safety initiative, sustainment is essential to achieving your intended results (and return on investment).

Learning from the "Divas": Keys to Sustainment and Making Change Stick

When I asked Brenda and Candace what lessons they've learned, they identified five keys to their success with sustainment and continuous improvement.

1. **Designate and support strategy champions long-term:** At Spencer, five “Divas” have been meeting weekly since 2011 with the sole purpose of strengthening, refreshing and expanding their strategy. The Divas take very seriously their responsibility as sustainment drivers, and over time, they have become a powerhouse team with an open door to others with insights, ideas



and initiative. This team often receives suggestions from one of their 520 staff and sometimes even video clips to show that Language of Caring really has been a game changer for Spencer.



Karen Brandt
Director of
Supply Chain
Management



Patty
Manwarren
Director of
Environmental
Services,
Nutrition & Valet



Brenda
Tiefenthaler
VP of Patient
Care and
Informatics



Jeannette Hasley
Director of Birth
Center



Candace Daniels
HR Generalist,
Employee Benefits
and Wellness

“The divas say this is important, yet not easy, because in rural settings your colleague is your friend, neighbor or cousin!”

- 2. Listen, then act!** In addition to scrutinizing all sources of feedback from patients and families (survey scores, compliments and complaints, etc.), the Divas hold periodic focus groups in order to take their strategy’s pulse, listen to managers and staff and learn how people are feeling, and identify a priority theme and tactical recommendations for the coming year. Past themes: Perspectives (of doctors, coworkers, patients and staff) and “I am Spencer Hospital”. This year, the Divas heard talk of uneven commitment among managers and perceptions of a double standard -- that some leaders’ behavior was inconsistent with a caring culture. As a result, they identified the theme for the year as Leadership Development. They have put together leadership development that focuses on walking the talk, professionalism, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence. A special focus is on helping leaders develop the guts and language skills for giving each other feedback when they see sub-standard behavior on their part or on the part of their employees. The Divas say this is important, yet not easy, because, in rural settings, your colleague is your friend, neighbor or cousin!
- 3. Keep it fresh by adding depth and going for mastery:** While the foundational skill in the Language of Caring for Staff program is the Heart-Head-Heart method, the program engages people in learning a full set of skills that effectively communicate Heart (e.g. Practice of Presence, Acknowledging Feelings, Explaining Positive Intent, the Gift of Appreciation, the Blameless Apology, and more). Because the Divas are determined to go beyond “the elementary”, they help people master these skills and use them consistently by revisiting one skill per quarter in depth, holding housewide mandatory one-hour training sessions. To assure that they accommodate various workers’ schedules, they offer up to 12 sessions/month and allow employees to register for their session in their HealthStream computer-based learning system. Their tactics engage people in applying the skills to tough situations that include conflict and peer-to-peer communications. Even folks on FMLA are required to make up the class! They have hired their local utility company, Spencer Municipal Utilities’ videography department to film one session so they can assign the video via HealthStream to those who missed the mandatory class.

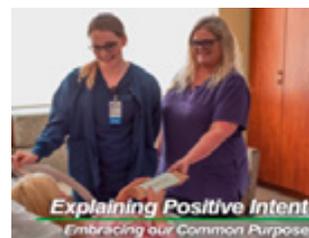


"The number one key to effective sustainment, according to Spencer Hospital, is being open and willing to change."

4. **Illuminate the positive, in a fun way, relentlessly:** The Divas are convinced that, to keep caring communication top of mind and fresh, they need to inject fun, creativity, heartwarming story-sharing and celebrations into their plans. Over the years, they have poured variety, whimsy and creativity into their reinforcement celebrations and these have been nothing short of amazing and inspiring. The group shared with me fun training ideas that they have incorporated such as:

- They created an Operating Room simulation using the game OPERATION
- When focusing on the power of addressing each other by name, they had all with intentional interruptions/obstacles and had employees fill the role of the surgeon trying to balance and prioritize.
- When focusing on the power of addressing each other by name, they had all staff quickly match each physician's name and picture, and then they provided each department with a book consisting of all 520 employees' pictures and encouraged all departments to try and determine each employee's first name.
- They created an ED simulation where employees from all departments had to fill busy Emergency Room roles and learn to triage/assess "popsicle stick" patients with a Quality Control emphasis, while using Language of Caring skills.
- To reinforce the Gift of Appreciation, they developed re-fillable baskets filled with goodies and cards (with a thank you for going the extra mile) and provided these to each department to encourage peer recognition.

5. **Be open and willing to change.** The number one key to effective sustainment, according to Spencer leaders, is being open and willing to change. While keeping core Language of Caring components, they adapted not only their training material, but the delivery style and method. They've rotated who conducted the trainings, the videos, the teambuilding activities, the room setups and more. For many years, they assigned a video each quarter through HealthStream for all employees. In other years, they created quarterly posters that they delivered to departments to hang and rotate. Most recently they created computer screensavers using their own staff to highlight a Language of Caring skill.

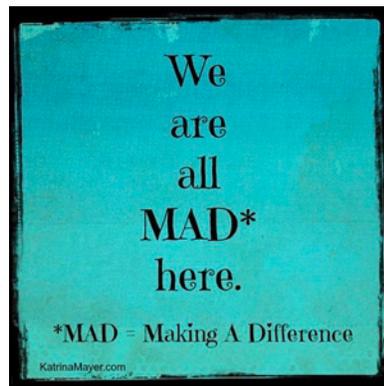


Relentless Commitment and Sustained Impact

Where is Spencer now? Despite the challenges rural healthcare organizations face, Spencer is thriving. Says Brenda and Candace, "HCAHPS scores have improved and remain high. Employees who leave often want to come back, because they realize how special the culture is. Applicants comment how friendly everyone is at the hospital. Patients and families say, *It's different here. I can feel it.* And we have a culture in which caring is visible in all of our interactions. And that makes us proud and is worth all the work."



Going to Dallas this week for The Beryl Institute Patient Experience Conference 2019? Please stop by the Language of Caring booth to say hi!



Making More Fun at Work

Our work typically includes not only busy-ness, but also stress and pressure. It helps so much to build more fun into work. Engage your team in brainstorming and/or selecting 3 or 4 ideas your team could enact in order to bring more fun to busy days.

Instructions

- A.** Start by having people brainstorm everything, big or small, that is fun at work. Put a two minute limit on this (because it could be demoralizing to run out of ideas).
- B.** Now, share your goal of finding more ways to have fun at work.
- C.** Post a list of ideas from other teams and invite people to do a quick poll of which ideas they like. See if any ideas are popular. If so, decide who will make these happen with your team.

Fun at Work: Ideas from other healthcare organizations:

- 1.** Have a paper airplane contest. Whoever's plane goes the farthest gets an extra 15 minute break.
- 2.** For one hour, compliment everyone you interact with.
- 3.** Have a child (or several children) paint your team a picture.
- 4.** Have a fifteen-minute exercise break for the whole office.
- 5.** Write a letter to the most famous person in your field asking for one piece of advice.



6. Take turns proposing a 1-minute relaxation exercise that makes people look weird (like yoga nostril breathing).
 7. Have a coloring contest (with a time limit).
 8. Everyone write a “thank you” note to their favorite patient, customer, or coworker.
 9. Offer to do your co-worker’s most hated task.
 10. Bring in face paints and paint each other’s faces.
 11. Create a team song.
 12. Ask everyone what their favorite animal is and why.
- D. Have people work in trios to come up with one idea per team that THEY think would add some fun to your team’s work experience. Share and commit to enacting some of these.



Recommended
Reading

- D Berwick, *The Triple Aim: Why We Still Have a Long Way to Go*;
- S Berg, *Empathy: A critical ally in physician burnout*.



This newsletter is brought to you by:



 **Language of Caring**
A BRANCH OF PLANETREE INTERNATIONAL

Making Caring Visible.

Inspire a caring community where staff love to work, physicians want to practice, and patients rave about the people and their care.

Driven by a passionate commitment to improve the human experience in healthcare, Language of Caring partners with organizations to establish a standard for caring communication and help everyone use the concrete skills that make their caring visible in interactions with patients, families and each other.

Our powerful process includes planning, state-of-the-art skill-building methods, development of leaders and facilitators, and proven tactics for habit-building and sustainment.

“Our team members are much more engaged and much more welcoming, warm and enthusiastic not only with patients, but also with each other. And it feels absolutely genuine. If someone asked me about Language of Caring, I’d say—it’s about caring and it’s about authenticity.”

— Carlos Castaneda, Strategic Programs Coordinator Adelante Healthcare (AZ)

To learn more about our solutions, join us for our introductory webinar on May 14th!

Register Now!