Patient Experience Management

10 tips for the successful development and execution of Voice of the Customer Programmes for patients, residents and their carers

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Voice of the Customer Programmes, sometimes referred to as Customer Feedback Programmes, have the ultimate goal of ensuring the delivery of a great customer experience; to maximise customer loyalty and consequently to improve business performance.

They are widely used by many organisations in many customer centric industries and are designed, implemented and executed to help these companies understand their customers’ needs, attitudes and experiences and to drive immediate action on customer feedback.

However, as a number of recent reports into healthcare provision have stressed, these programmes are equally important within the healthcare sector; ensuring patients, residents and their carers and families receive the care and attention they deserve.

Building a comprehensive Voice of the Customer Programme has many interconnected elements. Within this document we have outlined the 10 best practices for developing, implementing and running Voice of the Customer Programmes which will define the future success of your patient care programme.

You will read how to design a successful programme to capture feedback from patients, residents, carers and other key stakeholders to apply to organisational improvement to achieve greater levels of care and satisfaction. Going beyond the friends and family question to really understand patients’ experiences.
1 Make patient feedback part of the experience

Your patients, residents and their carers will give you feedback on your service if the right feedback channels are available to them. Therefore you should be aware of all available touch points between your service and the customer.

Offer your patients, residents and their carers as many channels as possible for collecting feedback and allow them to provide their opinions about their experiences. This could include surveys, social media i.e. twitter and Facebook, word-of-mouth, internet blogs and forums, direct communication with staff, etc.

2 Make the voice of the customer tangible on the internet

Your patients, residents and their carers are talking about you and to you; in countless internet forums, blogs and on social networks. These communication streams clearly detail their views and provide in depth detail on the quality of your care services.

It is therefore essential in today’s environment that your feedback programme embraces and integrates the monitoring of social media and tracking of blogs etc. By actively monitoring discussions about your organisation you can identify current topics, spot overall trends and opportunities and vitally, you can intervene and manage specific issues.
Best Practises - Top 10 Tips

3 Design appealing and engaging survey experiences

Any survey of your patients, residents and their carers should form part of the overall experience. Therefore any feedback survey should invite a dialogue about the experience through more conversational questionnaires. For example the use of open-ended questions allows respondents to tell their story about the experience.

Therefore, when executing satisfaction surveys avoid long lists of statements about internal processes, which are potentially not relevant to the patient, resident or carer. The survey should be created in a form that enables the respondent to provide open and relevant feedback in terms of their experience. Patients, residents and their carers should have a certain degree of control over the length and the content of the survey according to the relevance of their experience and the services they have used.

Multiple forms of response should be offered to the respondent where possible, e.g. telephone, mobile, online, SMS, postal, IVR, etc. In online surveys respondents can be engaged through the use of rich media techniques, i.e. more visual, interactive and dynamic questions and through the personalisation of the survey experience. This can also help with vulnerable groups who may struggle with more text heavy interview approaches.

4 Close the feedback loop

Patient dissatisfaction is very often a gradual process. By immediately identifying any negativity as it arises we can address specific issues to ensure problems are addressed before they impact on large numbers of patients.

Understand the requirements of your patients, residents and their carers at all times. The use of real-time pre-defined triggers on surveys detailing patient concerns will provide frontline staff the opportunity to resolve the issue to drive satisfaction. The implementation of a formal process including predefined responsibilities, action planning tools and escalation processes will help to resolve customer issues early. In order to close the customer feedback loop it is important to inform patients, residents or their carers about the resolution activities, let them track the activities and gather feedback on the final resolution.
By only using conventional structured data from surveys the more rich insights will be missed. The use of sophisticated analytics tools will provide greater understanding about patients, residents and their carers and their true reasons for satisfaction.

Surveys, comment fields, call centre transcripts, inbound e-mails, social media posts and tweets exhibit a comprehensive pool of information and insights. Additionally posted videos, podcasts and other sources of unsolicited feedback can be insightful in more closely understanding your patients. Smart techniques such as text analysis and sentiment analytics harness rich stores of unstructured data. Combining this with traditional data sources will provide valuable insights to help you better understand patient experience and behaviour. This in turn will help support and inform strategic and operational decisions.

In order to analyse and effectively assess the root causes of dissatisfaction and to identify the operational improvements to be implemented, a holistic view and understanding of the experience is required. This can be achieved through the combination of disparate data into a single view.

Survey data needs to be combined with data from other systems or sources to be seamlessly integrated into one holistic system. For example, these sources could include other survey data, customer data, patient numbers, finance data, operational metrics, etc. Additionally the combination of survey data with data from social media posts, tweets and internet forums will give you a great opportunity to understand the thoughts and emotions of your patients, residents and their carers to better identify areas for improvement.
Transparency is one of the key success factors in the design and execution of every feedback programme. It is vital to ensure that the “right people” have access to the “right data” at the “right time”.

Big picture summaries and strategy relevant insights will be distributed to the executive management and operations managers will see detailed tactical reports. Frontline staff should have access to easy to understand and actionable findings through dashboards, patient/resident profiles and so on.

Capture and analyse interaction of patients, residents and their carers and turn this information into meaningful, actionable insights. Understanding what drives satisfaction is therefore key.

Through the application of advanced analytics and techniques such as data mining, key insights to predict future satisfaction and dissatisfaction can be generated to drive significant operational improvement. Advanced analytics such as driver analysis, predictive modelling, data linkage, text analytics, segmentation, forecasting, etc. will provide insights that help implement action plans and understand the impact of your actions on your patient, resident and carer experience.
Implement a process to drive actions and improvements from the data

As a matter of course even the best data will not improve performance if it is not continuously converted into actions. The patient, resident and carer feedback programme should be used to recognize new challenges early enough, to assess the relevance of specific issues and to implement a strategy for the conversion of improvement measures.

You will not improve satisfaction through short-term ad-hoc actions. Continuity and a systematic approach are vital. Therefore a feedback programme should move beyond simple satisfaction reports and should integrate easy to use patient, resident and carer experience along with performance management tools for frontline staff; with formal processes and procedures for implementing actions, e.g. best practice guide, target setting, action planning, closed-loop issue resolution, improvement planners, etc.

Make the feedback programme a strategic initiative

In order to make your patient, resident and carer feedback programme a success it is essential to be dedicated to feedback, have a dedicated team in place, get buy-in from frontline staff and have support from the top.

Within the organisation it is necessary that resources are available in all involved units and that executive sponsorship is achieved. In order to address issues on cultural factors or change management processes, HR should be involved from the beginning. Additionally, milestones and targets need to be set at the design phase in order to ensure the programme has a clear path to follow and engenders buy-in at all levels. It is not a pass/fail tick box exercise!
In summary, don’t forget about:

- Making patient, resident and carer feedback part of the service experience
- Making the voice of the customer tangible on the internet
- Designing appealing and engaging survey experiences
- Closing the loop on patient, resident and carer feedback
- Using smarter techniques to unlock insights from unstructured and unsolicited data
- Linking feedback to other data sources
- Communicating reports throughout the organisation
- Shifting the focus from metrics to diagnostics
- Implementing a process to drive actions and improvements from the data
- Making the patient, resident and carer feedback programme a strategic initiative
Our staged process of integrated Voice of the Customer enables your ability to:

- Design patient/resident centric feedback mechanisms
- Engage with your patients, residents and their carers
- Integrate feedback from various sources
- Manage the information and apply advanced analytics
- Deliver actionable information and learn from insights
- Drive immediate action from feedback to improve performance
Steve King - Head of Services Research at SPA Future Thinking

Steve joined the company in 1993 and is a key member of the management team; heading up a team of 12 researchers specialising in customer, employee and social engagement research across service industries including healthcare, transport, utilities, public sector and higher education. He is a firm believer in putting the voice of the customer into the heart of business decision, linking feedback to key business performance metrics.

Steve has devised some of the largest quantitative projects conducted by the agency and specialises in mixed methodology projects that include both qualitative and quantitative elements. He has a passion for introducing advanced analytical techniques into areas where these have not been used historically. Steve’s work on advocacy rates within a leading Russell Group university was described as ‘trail-blazing’ by Dr Paul Marsden of the London School of Economics.

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