

## Reaching Out and Moving Up: Redefining Customer Service

*Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton  
Hamilton, New Jersey*

Customer service is the most visible element to the patients and is among the primary drivers for virtually every consumer measurement. The first time that Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton conducted a survey of consumers was in 2002, which came right on the heels of their new initiatives. As recently as 1998, the hospital had virtually no positive attributes to celebrate. Today, they have become a model for truly excellent healthcare and customer service.

### HealthStream Research

HealthStream Research is a national leader in the measurement of physician, employee, patient, and community satisfaction for healthcare organizations. We currently work with more than 1,100 facilities nationwide, including many of the nation's largest for-profit and not-for-profit health systems and specialty healthcare companies.

HealthStream Research's 2005 consumer study has shown that the hospital improved greatly in terms of image and preference. Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital

Hamilton was mentioned statistically far more often in 2005 than in 2002 for numerous attributes. In 2002, they had only a 32% preference share in their primary service area and just a 7% preference share in the secondary service area. Jump to 2005, and these scores have skyrocketed to 48% and 23%, respectively. These findings were very exciting for the hospital and revealed that Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton is much stronger in the consumer market than it was only three years ago.

Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton is in a very competitive market, which obviously presented difficult challenges. "There are five hospitals in our county alone that are competing for the attention and loyalty of area consumers," said Diane Grillo, Assistant Vice President of Health Promotions. "With such fierce competition, our work was really cut out for us."

In HealthStream Research's Brand Equity Hierarchy, an organization must first ensure a high awareness level in the community—without knowledge of existence, the other stages won't matter. Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton knew that they had to address the community's awareness of their services *and* they had to rebuild their image.

**Hospital Preferred Most Overall:  
By Service Area, By Year**

Primary Service Area		Secondary Service Area	
2002	2005	2002	2005
32%	48%	7%	23%

“We looked internally at our efficiency, equipment, processes, and the relationships between employees, nurses, and doctors. Most importantly, however, before we could broadcast to the community that we were the best, we first had to *become* the best. Only then could we truly reach the community—the experience you market must match the experience the community receives, or all your marketing will be for nothing,” said Diane Grillo.

## The Actions and Best Practices That Brought Success



The new **RWJ Center for Health & Wellness** has been one of their greatest community outreach successes. “Over 200 pieces of strength training and cardio equipment, personal trainers, an aquatic center, a full staff of nurse educators, comprehensive health library with computer access, a JeanneMichel day spa, Mulberry Street Bistro, healthy cooking kitchen and childcare—we packed a lot into 86,000 square feet, with every inch of it dedicated to improving the health of our community through education and example,” said Diane Grillo. “In 1998, we only had 2,700 attendees for community education. After three years of aggressive community outreach and the

building of this new center, that number is up to 40,000. In fact, we built this center in direct response to the needs of our community.”

The medically-based model is anchored by an 18-member Medical Advisory Panel of physicians that represent a variety of specialties and provide direction to the staff and oversee the content of many educational offerings at the Center. The site includes a 220-seat conference center that can be subdivided for breakout groups. This unique meeting space includes opportunities for attendees to exercise before, during or after meetings.

“We had been seeing more patients who were chronically obese, but there were no quality fitness centers serving the community. We wanted to give our community a true center for wellness programs and health education, and show them that we are more than an acute care hospital—we are also a center for prevention and wellness, a real home for community education. We even moved our rehab unit there—the see-through glass means that we are not only showing the rehabilitation patients the proper techniques for healthy exercises, but educating the members as well. We *show* you how to be healthy.”

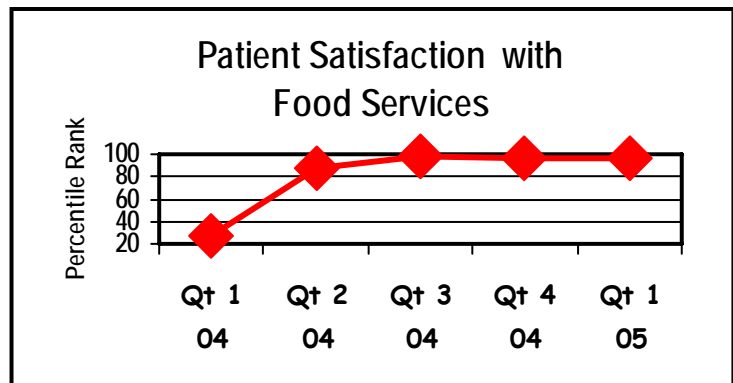


The Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton made a bold promise for their emergency department, a commitment to their community that caught *everyone's* eye—the **15/30 Guarantee**. “You will see a nurse within 15 minutes and a doctor within 30 minutes—or we pay the Emergency Room bill. Needless to say, patients have been *very* happy with this level of service. It is something that truly sets us apart from what people expect from a trip to the hospital. And the facts speak for themselves—we have the busiest Emergency Room around!”

They didn't stop in the Emergency Room—they also addressed patient issues in outpatient services. “Unlike what people have learned to expect throughout their lives, we made getting diagnostic tests and lab work an efficient and easy process. For lab tests, not only do we guarantee you will be seen in 15 minutes, but we take it a step further. We guarantee your physician will have the report within 24 hours. We see the patients and physicians as our customers, and both deserve the highest levels of customer service.”

For the attributes *Is the most pleasant and comfortable for patients and their visitors* and *Delivers the most personalized care to patients*, the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton is in many ways more like a fine hotel than what one would expect from a stay at a hospital. How often have you seen the following words in the same sentence? Hospital, room service, formal attire. Oh, and let's toss in 'harp school' and you can begin to see what an unusual approach they took in improving and redefining customer service.

“We offer ‘**Food on Demand**’ room service from five in the morning until nine in the evening. The menu is beautiful, and it's a full menu with many choices. You can even get breakfast at night—all choices are available at all times. And, your server will bring the meal to your room wearing formal attire,” said Diane Grillo. “You also get free telephone and a free newspaper. In fact, it's all free, even the meals! It's an annoyance and a security issue for patients and visitors to carry around and keep up with cash—so we don't ask them to.”



And what goes great with food? Music! “Our **Harp School** program has been a success on so many levels. Research has shown that playing the harp has remarkable health benefits to many patients. The program is free, but everyone must do ‘internships’ by playing all over the hospital. This is a fun and refreshing experience that brightens up patients and staff everywhere,” said Diane Grillo. “It's all part of delivering the most unique and personalized care possible. With music therapy, massage therapy, and even pet therapy, we take care of the entire patient experience—and for their friends and families. Take great care of a patient, you have one ambassador—take great care of the patient's friends and family, and you have an army of ambassadors to the community.”

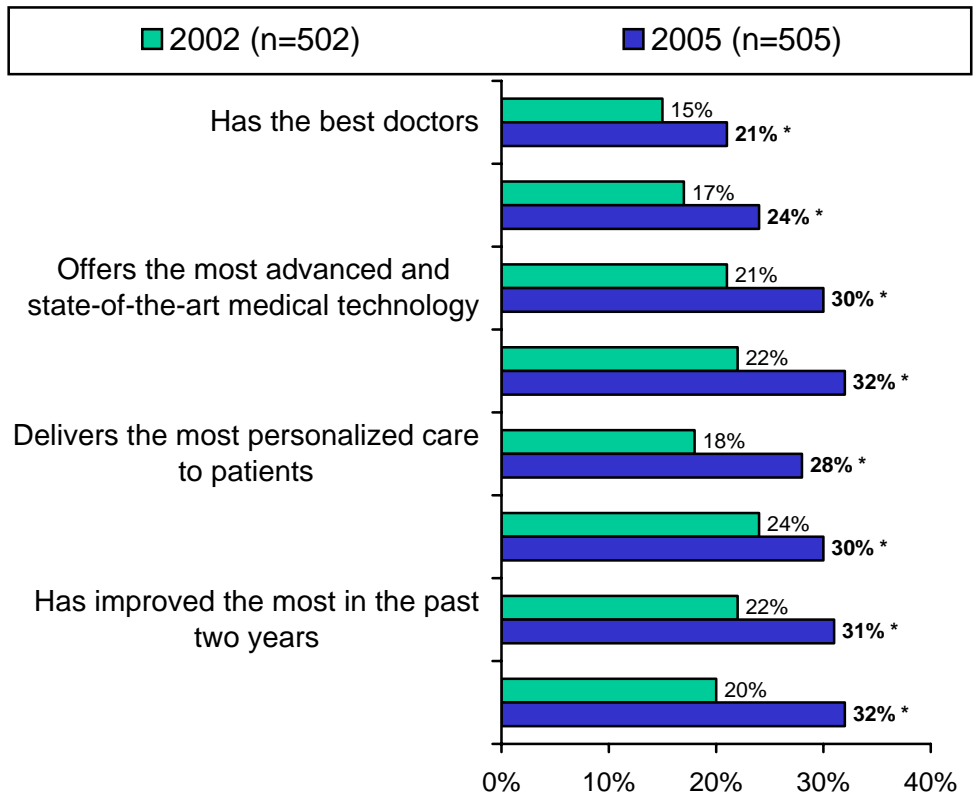


## The Results

“Once we knew that we were on the right track internally, we implemented a direct mail piece that used our own physicians and nurses, with a focus on educational background. We mailed this out each quarter, monitored the responses, and tweaked the message as necessary,” said Diane Grillo. “HealthStream Research's *HealthStyles* research is particularly invaluable for helping us reach specific target audiences in the most effective way. Knowing what *kinds* of consumers we have in our service areas and the best ways to reach them takes a lot of the guesswork out of marketing.”

They certainly had a lot to tell their community. One of the most remarkable successes achieved by the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton is their 2004 Baldrige Award. Not just remarkable—amazing, spectacular, or inspiring is more like it, as only a handful receive the award and only a handful of *those* are hospitals. But if that and the successes of the RWJ Center for Health & Wellness, the room service program, or the harp school isn't enough to impress you, take a look at their scores and you'll be pleasantly surprised. Not just gains, but *massive* gains.

**Attribute Improvements from 2002 to 2005**



**“First Place” Ratings Compared to Other Area Hospitals**

Attribute	1994	1996	2000	2002	2005
Most Convenient to Home	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Most Responsive to the Community		✓	✓	✓	✓
Most Improved		✓	✓	✓	✓
Cleanest		✓	✓	✓	✓
Most Personal Care to Patients			✓	✓	✓
Pleasant/Comfortable for Patients/Visitors				✓	✓
Advanced, State of the Art Technology & Equip			✓	✓	✓
Best Doctors			✓	✓	✓
Best Nurses			✓	✓	✓
Best Overall			✓	✓	✓

## Success Story: Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton

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“HealthStream Research has been a great partner and resource for both measuring the success of our program initiatives and for new insights on how we can do more and more for the community. The consultation, analyses and reports they provided gave us a real blueprint for even more gains and successes. We’ll continue to improve, and we’ll keep making gains in the future,” said Diane Grillo. “No resting around here for us!”

