

Letting Excellence Do the Talking: An Imaging Department's Success In Thrilling Patients

Mercy Medical Center, Outpatient Imaging, Baltimore, MD

This is the first in a series of articles that will provide a detailed exploration into the successes of Mercy Medical Center's Outpatient Imaging department.

Mercy Medical Center's Outpatient Imaging department is a great example of turning *insight* into *action*. Action requires courage. Knowledge of the data brings with it responsibility to address the issues raised by the data. When Mercy Medical Center's Outpatient Imaging department was presented with the results from its patient satisfaction research, they had the courage to tackle all the issues head-on. Not only that, but they had the courage to set aggressive goals *and* hold themselves accountable to achieve these goals.

Mercy Medical Center's Outpatient Imaging department has thrived with measurement, goal-setting, and *action*. Their dedication to the Mission of the Sisters of Mercy, however, is their guiding force. Respecting each patient's personal dignity and practicing compassionate patient care every day are some of the core values of the Sisters of Mercy. With aggressive goal-setting and the foundation of excellence in patient care, Mercy Medical Center's Outpatient Imaging department has gone from good to great!

How They Achieved Stellar Results

HealthStream Research conducted an in-depth interview with Bryan Fick (Vice President of Clinical Services and Institute for Cancer Care), Patty Sheehan (Director of Imaging Services) and Julianne Johnson (Vice President of Accreditation Management) to discuss how they succeeded on a wide range of their high-performance items. What they shared could help other hospitals improve in just about any patient care setting.

Survey Items

- **The registration process: 92nd percentile rank**
- **Ability to schedule the visit on a convenient day and time: 92nd percentile rank**

"We have two dedicated registrars," said Patty Sheehan. "One is for handling our scheduled patients and the other is for our walk-in patients."

HealthStream Research

HealthStream Research is a national leader in the measurement of patient, physician, employee, 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.

Most of our patients are scheduled, so the walk-in registrar helps with scheduled patients whenever possible. It is also crucial to keep track of patient scheduling backlogs to ensure that patients are scheduled in a timely fashion. This knowledge helps us properly prepare and schedule our appointments.”

Survey Item

How well the patient’s pain was managed: 99th percentile rank

“In Imaging, we generally don’t give pain medications, but there are many other ways to make sure the patient is comfortable. In our setting, we can help the patient with warm blankets and cushions to keep them comfortable during exams,” said Patty Sheehan. “We seek to be that healing presence for all of our patients, providing a calm and caring attitude throughout their procedures and tests. It is also important to talk to the patient throughout the entire exam—let them know what is about to be done and how long it will take. Years ago, our survey results showed we had room for improvement with our communication with patients. We shared these results—unfiltered—with our staff. Together, we have made patient communication one of our highest priorities. Our staff pride themselves in their ability to communicate with patients and meet their needs. That’s how we demonstrate Mercy’s goal of respecting the dignity of each patient in our care. This has led to improvement not only in this (*pain management*) attribute, but in many others as well.”

“Patty had the courage to *use* the data, letting the research help us find the root causes and create solutions,” said Bryan Fick. “We also used comment cards to get immediate feedback from our patients on how we were doing with key issues. This was very helpful in keeping us on track for success.”

Survey Items

- **How well the staff kept family and friends informed about the patient’s care and treatment: 99th percentile rank**
- **How well the staff kept the patient informed of any delays in care and/or treatment: 93rd percentile rank**

“The patients’ family and friends are allowed to remain alongside whenever possible. When this is not possible, we make sure that updates are given every 15 minutes,” said Patty Sheehan. “In fact, we have a ‘15 Minute Rule’ that is used elsewhere in the hospital.”

Survey Item

The staff’s respect for the patient’s privacy: 91st percentile rank

“This is one of the areas that benefited most from our extensive construction updates, which greatly enhanced our ability to protect the privacy of patients. We scored low on this attribute in the past, but Mercy Medical’s investment gave us more room and much nicer surroundings,” said Bryan Fick. “Imaging has a great design—the changing room can be locked by the patient, and the room connects directly to the x-ray room. Before, we had a curtain, and that just didn’t make the patients feel like they had privacy. Having a changing room connected to the x-ray room also means that patients don’t have to walk down a hall wearing a gown in front of other patients.”

“We also have a connected bathroom right there in the x-ray room. This is especially appreciated by fluoroscopy patients,” added Patty Sheehan. “This gives them immediate and private access to a bathroom.”

Survey Item

The staff's availability to provide assistance at all times: 95th percentile rank

“Patients are not left alone or directed to find a location on their own. We have a commitment to helping all patients at all times—and that means staying with them until they get exactly where they need to go,” said Patty Sheehan. “If the patient is never alone, by definition that means that at least one of our staff is always with them and available to provide help.”

Survey Item

How well all of the staff worked together as a team: 97th percentile rank

“Part of teamwork is having adequate staff levels comprised of highly competent staff. We maintain extraordinarily low vacancy rates for the Imaging department. The national average is around 10%, but Patty Sheehan and the Imaging department has maintained a 0% vacancy rate,” said Bryan Fick.

“Consistency of our staff is also a major component of our success. We have technologists that have been here for more than 30 years,” said Patty Sheehan. “We also added a supervisor position for each modality—x-ray, MRI, ultrasound, and so on. The supervisors help keep communication flowing between the different modalities. This approach also provides opportunities for our technologists to cross-train in other modalities. It provides a tangible career ladder for our technologists.”

“We also added several technical assistant positions for the technologists. The assistants work alongside the technologists and can help with a wide range of tasks. This frees up the technologists to perform at the highest technical level—they can focus on the tasks that require specialized expertise,” said Bryan Fick.

Survey Item

The cleanliness of the facility: 96th percentile rank

“No question—we succeed in this area because we have *dedicated* housekeepers. They are very friendly and approachable. We consider them as part of our department, and we make sure we give them lots of recognition. We are worried that some other department might steal them!” said Patty Sheehan. “Of course, the renovations have helped tremendously. Fresh paint, new floors, and local artists are featured throughout—these all come together to create a clean, hospitable, and safe environment.”

Survey Item

How the staff took steps to provide a medically safe environment for the patient's care: 92nd percentile rank

“One of the ways Mercy Medical Center helps ensure the safety of patients is by banding not only our inpatients but also our outpatients. Our technologists check the band for each patient and verify the information against the chart. This is very reassuring to patients,” said Patty Sheehan. “We also monitor hand-washing for all staff. We encourage staff to wash their hands in the presence of patients, so they know we are taking the proper steps to keep them safe.”

Survey Item

The staff's instructions about how to care for the patient after the visit: 95th percentile rank

“We implemented a post-procedure card that our patients have found very helpful. The card tells them the name of the technologists, the procedures that were performed, and contact information if the patient has any questions or requires a copy of the images,” said Patty Sheehan.

Bringing It All Together

Mercy Medical Center's Outpatient Imaging has an impressive overall satisfaction rating of 4.61, which places them at the 96th percentile rank for imaging units across the nation. Furthermore, they score at or above the 90th percentile rank for almost every attribute in HealthStream Research's national database. "While there are many things we've done to achieve our results, goal-setting has kept everything aligned and focused," said Bryan Fick. "The results have been phenomenal. We also can't ignore the impact that facility improvements have brought. The hospital was designed and built in the 1960s. Updating our building helped us look great, and our investment in staff, new technology, and equipment helped us *be* great. We continue to focus each day on achieving our goals. Every member of Outpatient Imaging is working towards the same outcome—delivering compassionate patient care and creating an environment that embodies the Mercy spirit."

"HealthStream Research has been a great research partner, and the results helped us establish measurable and tangible goals. Our consultant Bonnie Lowry (Senior Consultant, HealthStream Research) and Justin Musterman (Manager of Reporting, HealthStream Research) were great resources. Each time we needed help, they both stuck with us until we fully understood," said Julianne Johnson.

There is one final survey item to consider—Patient Advocacy. This item provides a measurement of how likely the patient is to recommend the facility/clinic to friend and family members. Did Mercy Medical's Imaging department do anything specific to achieve such a high rating to patient advocacy, coming in at the 94th percentile rank?

"No," quipped Patty Sheehan. "We let our excellence do the talking. We know that if we give excellent care to the patient, the patient will be thrilled with us."