

Improve Patient Satisfaction Scores with Surgical Patient Advocates

St. Agnes Healthcare: Same Day Surgery
Baltimore, Maryland

Few things are more frustrating than not knowing what is happening to a loved one in surgery. If you don't tell families and loved ones what is happening in the OR, you can rest assured that they are *imagining* what is happening in the OR. Managing this frustration is possible, however, if you can keep them informed—in a timely manner—of what is happening behind the closed doors. After all, knowledge is power. By providing a dedicated Surgical Patient Advocate, St. Agnes HealthCare's Same Day Surgery was able to achieve the 93rd percentile rank in Overall Satisfaction when compared to Same Day Surgery units across the nation, as well as high scores for privacy and physician involvement (*based on scores from the September to November 2006 measurement period*).

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.

“We have one FTE position shared by two RNs,” said Joyce Hall, Patient Relations Coordinator for St. Agnes Healthcare. “Both of them are also OR nurses—they truly know their way around the operating room. We believe it is very important for this position to be filled by a practicing nurse, preferably a nurse that also works in the OR. We chose two nurses that both work part-time in OR. The Surgical Patient Advocate reports to the Director of OR—this was a homegrown idea from within our OR teams, and we've had tremendous success with the program.”

Building the Doctor/Family Connection

Attribute: *The doctor's willingness to involve you in decisions about your care*
National Percentile Rank: 90th %

The primary duty of the Surgical Patient Advocate is to provide informative, detailed, and timely updates to the patients' families and loved ones. “A perfect example of the importance of the Surgical Patient Advocate is seen with our very own Dr. Esquivel. He does highly specialized cancer surgeries, with some procedures taking as long as 12 hours or more, and his patients come from all over the nation,” said Joyce Hall. “The Surgical Patient Advocate is crucial in building the connections between the surgeon and the families. Those 12 hours already feel like a lifetime to the families, but having a nurse dedicated to giving updates makes the process less frustrating for them.”

Privacy

Attribute: *The staff's respect for your privacy*

National Percentile Rank: 93rd %

As stated previously, the Surgical Patient Advocate provides detailed updates to the families. To address privacy, the Surgical Patient Advocates provides sensitive updates in a private setting. “Sometimes you have to make creative use of available space, and our Surgical Patient Advocates do a great job. When they need to tell a family something of a personal or sensitive nature, the advocate takes them to a private place. This also creates a calm, controlled environment for the family to express their emotions in response to the update.”

Bringing It All Together

Attribute: *Overall Satisfaction*

National Percentile Rank: 93rd %

The timeliness and content of the updates is crucial for building and maintaining high satisfaction scores. “The updates go far beyond, ‘The patient is doing just fine.’ The Surgical Patient Advocate takes it to a whole new level—they’ll be there to tell the family when the first incision is being made. The family receives step-by-step updates throughout the procedure. When the surgery is over, the Surgical Patient Advocate immediately informs the family and takes them to the recovery area,” said Joyce Hall.

“I’d like to thank the wonderful people at HealthStream Research,” said Joyce Hall. “You came out and did a great job presenting the results, and you provided us with excellent training. The Moments of Truth exercises were really powerful in letting us know precisely where to put our focus.”