

Physician Satisfaction: Achieve a High Response Rate and Take Action Based on Survey Results

Columbus Regional Hospital, Columbus, Indiana

Columbus Regional Hospital is a 225-bed hospital located in Columbus, Indiana. Columbus Regional has always performed well on HealthStream Research's Quality Check[®] Physician Satisfaction Survey, but for the past three years they have continued to improve and sustain that improvement. Three years ago Columbus Regional was performing at or above the HealthStream Research National Norm for nearly every item on the survey. Today, they are performing at or above the 75th percentile for nearly every item on the survey. In addition, Columbus Regional's scores for the "Overall Satisfaction" and "Satisfaction with Nursing Care" items are significantly higher than the HealthStream Research National Norm scores for these items.

We interviewed Vice President & Chief Medical Officer Tom Sonderman and the Director of Medical Quality Management Kathy Wallace to find out how Columbus Regional has been able to make and sustain such improvements. They believe that survey participation, examination and implementation of survey findings, low turnover rates, and respect for physicians are the major contributors to their physicians' high levels of satisfaction.

Make Sure All Physician Opinions Are Accounted For

The first step in making improvements in physician satisfaction, according to Tom and Kathy, is to make sure that all physician opinions are accounted for. Tom and Kathy place particular emphasis on having a high response rate to ensure this. This year, Columbus Regional implemented several procedures to encourage physicians to participate. These tactics obviously worked, as Columbus Regional completed their survey with a 53% response rate from physicians.

To attain this response rate, Columbus Regional used several methods. First, they talked about the previous survey and the improvements that had been made in response to it. They also mentioned the upcoming survey repeatedly through e-mails, memos, newsletters, and medical staff meetings. Columbus

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Regional also engaged Physician Office Practice managers in the effort by letting them know beforehand that the survey would be coming. The survey team at Columbus Regional used a wide range of methods to communicate prior to the survey, including e-mails, faxes, memos, phone calls, and posters.

Instead of having the surveys mailed from HealthStream Research's offices, Columbus Regional had all the surveys shipped to their survey coordinator. The HealthStream Research envelopes were then placed in a Columbus Regional envelope and mailed to physicians. The physician survey team at Columbus Regional believed that putting the survey in a familiar envelope would make it less likely to be thrown away. This method applies to the first mailing, as HealthStream Research sends out the next mailing only to physicians who have not returned a survey. The survey team at Columbus Regional came up with some great ideas to ensure that physicians and their office managers would not discard the second survey from HealthStream Research. Kathy Wallace and her team made a copy of the HealthStream Research envelope, magnified it, and made a poster with it stating, "Look for this envelope for your physician survey."

Columbus Regional continued to encourage survey participation throughout the survey process. Even after the reminder postcards and second survey mailings, Kathy Wallace and her team were hard at work using HealthStream Research's Results![®] interactive website to track physician responses. When the survey team noticed that a particular demographic of physicians was lagging behind in survey completion, they enlisted the help of Nurse Managers to encourage the physicians on their floors to complete the survey.

Use the Information Collected From the Survey

Columbus Regional also makes a strong effort to use the information collected from the survey. When the results of the survey are available, action plans are developed for each department. For example, the findings of Columbus Regional's 2004 survey clearly indicated challenges in surgery. As a result, the management team at Columbus Regional made an effort to "divide and conquer." An internal newsletter was developed to improve communication throughout the hospital. Columbus Regional also enlists the help of interdisciplinary teams that study the outcomes and findings of the survey. They assist in strategic planning, goal-setting, and evaluation of new technology. One such example involved the acquisition of a Document Imaging System. Physicians at Columbus Regional indicated that they would prefer a Document Imaging System to completing records electronically; by the end of 2005, their wish became a reality.

The results of the survey are not only shared with physicians, but also with the nursing staff. The results are often presented at nursing forums, often by unit to highlight specific challenges or accomplishments. The Nursing Practice Council and the Patient Care Management Council also use the survey results. The Nursing Practice Council is made up of staff-level RNs who take the information back to their peers. The Patient Care Management Council is a multidisciplinary team of managers who also take this information back to their peers and employees.

Columbus Regional has implemented several actions based on survey results. One of these is the use of custom questions. Custom questions were added to subsequent surveys to gather more information about specific issues uncovered in previous survey results. The management team realized that there were challenges in the surgery department and decided to monitor this area more closely by interviewing surgeons to gain perspective on the situation. This helped Columbus Regional develop appropriate custom questions to monitor changes in these areas. In addition to custom questions, Columbus Regional actively sought out Best Practice information regarding

Success Story: Columbus Regional Hospital

surgery scheduling through the help of a Benchmarking Partner. Columbus Regional approached HealthStream Research, looking for a top-performer in the area of surgery. HealthStream Research connected Columbus Regional with a willing partner to improve surgery scores. Columbus Regional is taking full advantage of this program and has scheduled site visits with their Benchmarking Partner. This provided tangible, practical ideas that could be implemented at Columbus Regional to improve their surgery department.

The administration at Columbus Regional believes that high retention rates for both physicians and nurses also contribute to high satisfaction scores. CMO Tom Sonderman points out that when physicians come to work at Columbus Regional, they stay. Columbus Regional has always had high retention, due in part to physician recruiters. The physician recruiters instituted a program where they identify what physicians desire and do their best to implement it. In addition to low turnover rates among physicians, Columbus Regional also has low turnover rates among the nursing staff. For example, there are virtually no temporary RNs at Columbus Regional, and they are continually reaching new levels of achievement, as evidenced by their accreditation as Indiana's first Magnet Hospital for nursing excellence.

One of the biggest contributors to physician satisfaction, according to the administration at Columbus Regional, is the appreciation and respect for physicians. This attitude of appreciation originates with hospital CEO Doug Leonard. Doug gives a "State of the Hospital" address annually at physician meetings, where he makes it a point to voice his appreciation and respect. Doug emphasizes how he and the administration at Columbus Regional are truly committed to physicians, respectful of their time, concerned about how physicians care for their patients, and interested in helping physicians grow their businesses.

It is no accident that Columbus Regional is a consistent top-performer in the area of physician satisfaction. The administrative team has made many efforts to obtain physicians' opinions and implement changes based on this information. Columbus Regional strongly believes that retaining nurses and physicians contribute to high levels of satisfaction, and they have put programs in place to ensure low turnover rates. CEO Doug Leonard emphasizes the hospital's commitment to — and respect for — physicians. All of these factors have worked together to make measurable, sustainable improvements at Columbus Regional Hospital. Congratulations to Columbus Regional Hospital for being a consistent top-performer in the area of physician satisfaction.