

Thrill Your Physicians: Transparent Communication, Dedicated Teams, Consistency, Teamwork, and Action Cause Medical Staff Scores to Soar!

Peninsula Regional Medical Center, Salisbury, Maryland

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.

Imagine two scenarios where you need to take your car to a service center. In the first scenario, you encounter nothing but strangers that have never met you or your car. They don't know about the persistent rattle you've been battling. You have to explain your problem to more than one person. They dive in and test for hours, but ultimately they couldn't "recreate the problem." You leave in a huff. Now, imagine another scenario. Robert has been your trusted service center manager for years, he is surrounded by the same mechanics year after year, and they greet you by name. "Oh, that rattle come back again? I remember what we replaced last time, so if that didn't fix it, it can only be one other thing. We'll take care of you." All the mechanics work together as a team and Robert knows which mechanic has the skills to address your specific problem. Because they've worked on your car before, they know exactly what to look for. This saves both time and money. Which scenario sounds better to you?

What does all this have to do with your medical staff? If you are constantly throwing a varied mix of nurses their way, your physicians won't have an established rapport, and the nurses won't know exactly what the physicians want or how they want it.

Peninsula Regional Medical Center has begun a revolutionary approach to improving the overall satisfaction of their physicians by creating consistent operating room product line-specific nursing teams and an environment of total physician involvement in all decisions that affect them. The results so far? From 2004 to their most recent medical staff survey, they moved up **thirty-seven notches** on their national percentile rank for overall medical staff satisfaction, and they're not even done yet!

How, you ask? Let's step through their impressive list of highly improved attributes and what they did to achieve them.

Question: “The Nurses in the OR”

Improvement of .69 points

“The most critical component of this impressive improvement came from the creation of dedicated product line-specific nurse teams, which we have instituted across a number of service lines. The physicians found this hugely satisfying,” said Tom Lawrence, M.D, MBA, Chief Medical Officer and Vice President of Medical Affairs. “We’ve got a very busy hospital, and a very busy OR. New people don’t bring service line-specific knowledge. It takes time to build rapport among physicians and nursing teams—if you maintain consistency in the nursing teams, the physicians will know what to expect, and the nursing teams will know what to deliver and *how* the physician wants it delivered. The doctors are able to concentrate and work faster, more efficiently, and more effectively.”

Question: “How quickly operating rooms are turned over between cases”

Improvement of .66 points

“The formation of product line-specific teams had a major impact on this. With total ownership and increased rapport between the physicians and nursing teams, OR procedures experienced increased productivity and efficiency,” said Dr. Lawrence. “Another major factor in this improvement was the standardization of operating room instrument sets. We also trialed staggered rooms, so that a surgeon can finish one procedure and immediately move to the next room.”

Question: “The administration’s responsiveness/supportiveness to the needs of the medical staff”

Improvement of .60 points

“The CEO and I had department-specific focus groups in a town hall meeting format with physicians from *all* departments, and the focus was, ‘What’s important to you?’ After these meetings, as the Vice President of Medical Affairs, I created action plans with accountabilities and timetables,” said Dr. Lawrence. “To keep physicians involved and in the loop at all times, we dedicated ourselves to total transparency. The action plans, timetables, and accomplishments were presented at medical executive meetings and quarterly medical staff meetings.”

They didn’t stop there, either. “We instituted a physician hotline, where the physicians could communicate any type of complaint or suggestion. The physicians’ comments are then immediately forwarded to administration, and the appropriate Vice President had to respond within 48 hours. Furthermore, an action plan had to be created within five business days. This sent a powerful message to our physicians that we considered them our biggest internal customer. It also let them know that whenever we aren’t doing something they want, it is because we didn’t know they wanted it, not out of malice. Generally, communication breakdown leads to frustration between physicians and administration, and the hotline allowed for a more direct method of communication to improve the turnaround of important issues with our medical staff,” said Dr. Lawrence.

To broaden the scope of organization-wide communication, they published an organizational chart with complete contact information for everyone. “This allowed for

more timely communication. The physicians never had to guess who they needed to contact or how to contact them,” said Dr. Lawrence.

Above all, you must listen *and* take action. “The worst thing you can do is to conduct a survey and then do nothing. For everything, we published our action plans and later celebrated the success of those actions. For example, we’ve been on Solucient’s 100 Top Wired Hospitals list, due mainly to our hospital-wide integrated clinical computer system. You would think that the physicians would love this technology, but in the 2004 survey they were less than thrilled. From HealthStream Research’s survey results, we learned that we hadn’t properly communicated the scope of this new system or offered adequate training and support. In 2004, we were quite low in the physicians’ rating for ‘The computerized hospital information system’. Now, we are in the 91st percentile. Listening to the physicians and involving them in change *works*,” said Dr. Lawrence.

Question: “The availability of equipment and technology in the OR”

Improvement of .59 points

“For all departments—especially the technology-heavy ones—our capital budgeting process involved *all* key physician stakeholders that would be impacted by the decisions. If you are making a purchase for surgical equipment, you’d better involve your surgeons! If you involve your key physician stakeholders in the budget decisions, not only do you get their valuable input, there are no surprises down the line when the purchases are made,” said Dr. Lawrence.

Question: “How well the hospital accommodates doctors when practicing at the hospital, in terms of easy access, efficiency, responsiveness of the staff, etc.”

Improvement of .54 points

“The doctors are thrilled with our web-based Physician Portal,” said Dr. Lawrence. “They can access clinical information, medical records, write orders, and check x-rays and scans from anywhere. This was a real crowd-pleaser! The best part is that this system decreased clinical errors. When the physicians are happier *and* clinical outcomes are improved, how could we *not* be thrilled?”

This attribute wasn’t just improved through technology, though. “We are undertaking a major building project. We knew from the beginning that parking was going to be affected, something that is *very* important to physicians—and for clinical outcomes as well, as you don’t want a physician to have any delays in providing care. The first thing we did was to tell the physicians that we also planned a four-level parking garage, with a hundred premium spots just for them. Imagine what would have happened if we hadn’t communicated this. They would have heard about the new building project only and would have immediately become unhappy about the looming parking problem. If you communicate first, you gain valuable insights and reduce the likelihood of surprise,” said Dr. Lawrence.

“HealthStream Research was instrumental in identifying our opportunities for improvement. The ability to get accurate, unit-specific, and specialty-specific data was key to our success. Also, their

Success Story: Peninsula Regional Medical Center

ability to provide customized surveys let us get directly to the root of many issues. 'The questions they recommended were fantastic, and their staff is highly professional,'" said Dr. Lawrence.

HealthStream Research expects to see Peninsula Regional Medical Center continue to soar. Their approach provides a wide range of 'best practices' that can help *any* hospital redefine excellence!