



## Service Recovery

Solution

### What...

What Service Recovery **IS**:

- ▶ Those prompt actions designed to alter the negative perceptions of dissatisfied patients, future patients, and family members, along with visitors. Service recovery is about restoring trust and confidence in our ability as an organization to "get it right" ... and when we fall short, to "make it right."

What Service Recovery **IS NOT**:

- ▶ A department, such as Risk Management or Administration (aka "The Complaint Department")
- ▶ A leader's job. By the time a patient or family concern reaches a leader, it is likely too late. There could already be social posts and the family has been called and dissatisfaction is spreading far and wide.
- ▶ Just saying you are sorry. While a properly delivered apology is important, it is only one piece of an effective response to someone who is dissatisfied.

No matter how good we become, situations arise resulting in the unmet expectations of our patients. Not all patients and their families want and need the same things, making it challenging to know – and meet – everyone's needs and expectations. The response of our organization to these unmet needs and expectations must be hardwired throughout every layer of the organization. This response is termed "Service Recovery."

**What is a Complaint?** It is a statement about expectations that have not been met, including mistakes or mishaps that have occurred.

For every customer who complains, there are an estimated 26 other dissatisfied customers who do not bring their complaint forward to the organization. So, for each complaint received for a mistake or misperception of care, there are 26 others who experienced the very same dissatisfaction yet remained silent.



**“There are two kinds of companies. The first, the most typical, views complaints as a disease to be got over, with memory of the pain rapidly suppressed. The second kind of company views complaints as a luscious opportunity.”**

- Tom Peters

If patients experience breakdowns in their experience, they begin to lose confidence and trust in our people, our services ... and maybe even our entire organization.

Big or small, any unmet need or expectation can have a negative impact. Most dissatisfaction results from seemingly minor or small infractions, oversights, or misperceptions. This might lead us to minimize it or dismiss it - believing that, in your view and in the overall scheme of things - “it’s not a big deal.”



Yet, if it is sensed or experienced that we cannot get the small things right, how can patients trust that we will do well with the complicated processes required to deliver high-quality care and outcomes?

When we can consistently meet the needs and expectations of patients, and their loved ones involved in their care experience, they are more likely to use our services again, more likely to recommend our services to others, and more likely to talk positively in the community about us.

And even when we fall short but can appropriately and adequately respond to the situation – through an effective and prompt service recovery response – we can restore our patients’ trust ... and their willingness to use our services again, recommend us to others, and even talk positively about their experience.



# How...

## THREE ESSENTIALS FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE RECOVERY

- ▶ It must be **fast**.
- ▶ It must be **sincere**.
- ▶ It must be **personalized** to fit the situation.

## GREAT FOUNDATIONS OF A FRONT-LINE SERVICE RECOVERY PROGRAM:

- ▶ **Employee Trust** – We extent trust to employees to do many important things such as care for patients, perform surgery, and use very expensive equipment. In that same light, organizations can train and trust front-line employees to recognize and resolve most every patient complaint and dissatisfaction.
- ▶ **Employee Empowerment** – Leaders need to refrain from questioning employees who dealt with a problem in a specific way. This can be extremely difficult for a leader to do and must be a part of the service recovery training of leaders. It's alright for a leader to engage in conversation with an employee to understand their actions and decision-making rationale in a Service Recovery situation, but leaders must remember that they weren't there, in that very moment. Positive coaching such as "It seems as if you handled that situation very well and that the patient responded well to your efforts. What if next time, you didn't offer a gas card in response to lost belongings. What could you do instead? Or what might the patient appreciate more or instead of that?" Employee empowerment can be a fragile thing. Don't let employee's feel disempowered or frustrated about your service recovery program because someone is always telling them they didn't do something well.
- ▶ **Employee Ownership** – Employees – especially those who work the frontline or at the front door to your organization – are in the best position to "see" when breaks in service and problems arise. They also have the very best ideas on how to resolve them for each individual patient – and likely all future patients. When employees are trained, empowered, and trusted, they can own the responsibility to watch for, and respond appropriately. As well, they can provide suggestions and ideas for permanent fixes that may prevent dissatisfaction.

## SERVICE RECOVERY IS EVERY EMPLOYEE'S JOB

- ▶ Every employee is a listening post to HEAR what patients are saying about their care. Employees are there and present with the patients and visitors.
- ▶ A problem reported to you becomes yours. Eliminate: "It is not my department," "It is not my job," or "That's not my area, you need to call..."



- Employees need to recognize when a bad service experience is happening and do something immediately. Effective leadership empowers employees to provide effective, immediate Service Recovery.



***“Solve issues at the lowest possible level, quickly, with the least amount of paperwork, bureaucracy, and drama.”***

- Sue Tetzlaff

## ***RECOGNIZING DISSATISFACTION***

- Directly ask patients if their expectations are being met. Ask what's most important to them and what they expect, and how we are doing with meeting those specific needs and expectations.
- Anticipate dissatisfaction. Know those situations in which there is a high likelihood for one or more patients to be satisfied (e.g., wait times are long for scheduled appointments or unscheduled tests/urgent or emergency care, equipment has broken down, etc.). Don't avoid asking patients directly how this is impacting them and how this can be made more satisfying for them.
- Patients/visitors might directly speak up about their dissatisfaction. Don't minimize it. Don't ignore it. Recover it.
- Look for signs of dissatisfaction. Patient may not be forthright in verbalizing their concerns. Examples of non-verbal cues (body language) that point to possible dissatisfaction needs to be a vital part of the training program.

## ***RESPONDING TO DISSATISFACTION (Service Recovery)***

As part of a service recovery program, it is helpful to develop and adopt a Service Recovery program acronym as an effective way for your employees to remember "what to do" in the stressful moment of a dissatisfied patient, their family member or visitor.

The following are some examples of Service Recovery acronyms:

- **HEAT** - **H**ear them out/listen; **E**mpathize; **A**pologize; **T**ake Action (see further details below)
- **AAA** - **A**cknowledge; **A**pologize; **A**mend
- **AAAA** - **A**nticipate; **A**cknowledge; **A**pologize; **A**mend
- **ReACT** - **R**ecognize; **A**pologize; **C**orrect; **T**ake Action to Prevent a Recurrence (see further details below in the Sample Service Recovery Policy)



## Service Recovery - H.E.A.T.

### *Hear them out.*

- Listen Carefully to the Concern
- Rephrase what you heard
- Clarify as needed
- Do not be defensive

### *Empathize to be understanding of:*

- "That must have been very upsetting/frustrating experience for you"
- "I can see that you are upset..."
- "This is not the way we like for things to be here at..."
- "We clearly did not meet your expectations."

*Apologize – a sincere apology (without blaming) is a personal and professional acknowledgement that your patient was inconvenienced and disappointed. It does not mean that you or others were necessarily at fault. If saying the words "I'm sorry" feels like taking on too much of the blame, try saying "I'm sorry to hear that..."*

- "I am sorry that we did not exceed your expectations."
- "I am sorry that your meal was (cold/hot/no coffee/etc.)."
- "I am so sorry that this happened to you and I'm so glad you let me know."
- "I sincerely apologize."
- "I am very sorry you are so frustrated."
- "I'm sorry you had a long wait."
- "I'm sorry this happened to you."
- "I am sorry that you were inconvenienced."
- "I wish we could have prevented this from happening."

### *Take action – learn what the specific unmet expectation is and remedy it:*

- "How can I make this better?"; "Here is what I will do... xxx... does this meet your expectation"; or "Is there anything else I can do?"
  - If it was a missed meal – arrange for it
  - If their room is dirty – get it cleaned
  - If it was a missed test – know who to call to schedule it
  - If the patient is dissatisfied because they are required to return for a retake of an x-ray or a repeat blood draw when they drove many miles to get here, provide them a gas card
  - If the family member is dissatisfied with a longer than expected wait, provide them with a free meal coupon for the cafeteria (from the Service Recovery Tool Kit, if this is part of the policy/program. See more below.)



- Follow Up. Make sure that Service Recovery is communicated/ documented and make sure it is effective. A leader's role is to analyze the effectiveness of the service recovery actions. The leader should round with the patient and employee to assess the effectiveness of Service Recovery.
- This is our opportunity to thank the patient or family member for bringing the concern to our attention.
  - "Thank you for taking the time to let me know how you feel."
  - "We can make a difference because you take the time to let us know."
- Employees need to know how to take action to avoid a repeat occurrence
  - Report Service Recovery efforts in hand-offs and/or Daily Safety Briefings
  - Document Service Recovery on a Tracking Form (for examples, see the Tools Section of the Patient Experience Team on the Capstone website)
  - Implement process improvement plans for common service issues (see template for Plan-Do-Study-Adjust)

Most service recovery is effective with follow up actions and the right words to empathize and apologize; however, in certain circumstances, a Service Recovery Toolkit may provide additional resources to help restore the situation in the mind of the patient.

The most important meaningful and appropriate aspect of offering something such as a free meal or a gift card, is that it "has to make sense" in response to the situation. Here are some examples of how Service Recovery Toolkit resources may serve helpful – and "make sense" - in response to very specific points of dissatisfaction:

- ▶ Radiology: Patient has to travel a long distance back to the healthcare organization for a retake of an X-ray in which we made a mistake – offer a gas card from the toolkit
- ▶ Med/Surg: Lost grandma's gray sweatpants – offer a gift card to replace them
- ▶ ER/Out Pt: Family has extended waiting for an ER or Outpatient Surgery visit – can offer a free meal voucher for the cafeteria or a gift card for a nearby cafe

NOTE: In your policy, as it pertains to providing patients with anything of monetary value, consult your applicable state or federal rules related to maximum dollar limits and develop training and tracking methods for complying. Due to this, it is recommended that when an employee-driven team, such as a Patient Experience Team, is involved in policy development, that Administration (via the Steering Team) be consulted and involved in this regard.



## *The Roles of the Leadership, the Steering Team, and/or the Patient Experience Team*

- ▶ Develop (or review/review) a policy and procedure for Service Recovery that guides "front-line" employees to take effective service recovery actions. Your Risk Manager/Quality leader is a great resource for this. (NOTE: Sample policy is included at the end of this Solution).
- ▶ Consider how other Positive Communication Standards, such as Listening, apply to Service Recovery. One of the key tenets of great service recovery is for the employee who encounters a dissatisfied patient or family member listens without becoming defensive. Perhaps the most important step in the recovery process is listening to the person and letting them vent their frustration and blow off steam. Letting the person tell their story and describe the impact of the failure is essential. Make your job easy as a team and roll out the positive communication standard of Listening (as well as Banning Blame and Body Language) at the same time you train employees on Service Recovery.
- ▶ The Service Recovery program details needs to be universal and standard across the entire workforce - and therefore, training is required to support each employee to succeed in being able to recognize, and recover, dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that your Service Recovery training be mandatory. It is THAT important and vital when you consider that likely someone is unhappy with your service right now as you read this Solution. **Remember 26 people never formally complain when they are dissatisfied.** That means that right now, an employee could be in a situation to recognize a dissatisfaction patient, family member or visitor – and they could effectively respond to it ... if they were trained properly. That takes an investment which often includes mandatory training – for all current employees and as part of new hire orientation.
- ▶ Approach Service Recovery efforts positively and thankfully. Encourage employees to thank the patient/person for voicing a concern. Encourage leaders to thank employees for their willingness to engage in Service Recovery action steps.
- ▶ Evaluate the effectiveness of the Service Recovery program (see Solution regarding 4 Ways to Validate)
- ▶ When the Patient Experience Team (and potentially in coordination with the Quality Department) sees a trend in patient complaints and service recovery, it is VITAL that action steps are taken to improve systems to avoid repeat occurrences of dissatisfaction. While you want service recovery to be happening, you want to minimize the need for it over time. Apathy will set in if employees repeatedly must provide service recovery for situations that could have been prevented or avoided given early and effective improvement efforts.



## EXAMPLE SERVICE RECOVERY POLICY

**SUBJECT:** Service Recovery Program (ReACT)  
XX

**POLICY/PROCEDURE NO:** XXXXX-

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** February 20XX

**DISTRIBUTION:** All Departments

**AUTHORIZED BY:**

**PURPOSE:**

To create a culture of empowerment beginning with front line staff that carries throughout the organization, including the Board of Trustees and involves the Medical Staff.

**GOAL:**

To empower employees to recover our patients' confidence when an unexpected event occurs that is within the employee's ability to change, correct or improve, making the experience a positive one for the patient/customer.

**SCOPE:**

All employees/volunteers will be empowered to utilize this policy in the event that there is a need to recover our patients' confidence. In keeping with our continual efforts to achieve Service Excellence, the hospital has adopted the **ReACT** approach. The intent of the **ReACT** approach is to help create an environment of employee responsibility and empowerment. When Service Recovery is initiated, communication to other employees is necessary for Service Recovery to continue through the entire hospitalization until the patient is discharged.

**POLICY:**

Every employee who encounters a patient/customer concern is empowered to use the **ReACT** approach:

- ▶ **Recognize:** If dissatisfaction or a complaint is made known to you, recognize it and use it as a chance to perform service recovery.
- ▶ **Apologize:** Sincerely say you are sorry for the person's experience. Use empathy to show concern: "I am so sorry you will be late to pick up your daughter. I can see that would be very frustrating." Body language is important, such as facing the person, nodding, and asking follow-up questions or making clarifying statements.



- ▶ **Correct:** If possible, fix the problem immediately or take the issue to the right person as soon as possible. Ask, "What would make this right for you?" Utilize the Service Recovery Toolkit if deemed appropriate to the situation.
- ▶ **Take Action to prevent a recurrence:** Let the dissatisfied person know what you will try to do to prevent a recurrence.

**Service Recovery Toolkits:** Med/Surg and the Patient Financial Services Office will be supplied with a **ReACT** Service Recovery Toolkit. The toolkit will include gift cards (\$5 food gift cards to the cafeteria, \$15 Gas gift cards, and \$15 Visa gift cards), the Service Recovery Spreadsheet and a Service Recovery Report form to be completed. The spreadsheet serves as a method to replenish the **ReACT** gift cards and to monitor use of the program. The form is to be completed each time a **ReACT** gift card is presented to a patient/customer and forwarded to the Department Supervisor and the QI/Risk Management Department. The form should not be given to the customer. It is up to the discretion of the employee to decide which gift card, if any, is most appropriate.

#### **Situations for which ReACT Gift Cards may be appropriate:**

- Late procedure due to unforeseen circumstances, scheduling problems.
- Patient expressed dissatisfaction with what he/she considered to be an unacceptable wait time.
- The patient's perception that an employee was rude, uncooperative, unprofessional, or uncaring.
- Dietary Complaints
- Housekeeping/Environment Issues
- Privacy Concerns
- Minor Property Loss (Lost of articles of clothing, etc.)

#### **Situations for which ReACT Gift Cards (and front-line service recovery only) may not be appropriate:**

- The patient has been given the wrong medication or treatment.
- The patient falls and breaks their hip and the family is very upset.
- Patient goes to surgery and the wrong procedure is performed.
- Lost hearing aids, glasses, large sums of money/valuables or prosthetics.

In the above situations, it would certainly not be appropriate to attempt Service Recovery using a simple apology or **ReACT** gift card. These situations should be reported through the appropriate channels (i.e. occurrence/incident reporting system) and in accordance with Hospital policy.



Employees should use good judgment when assessing the situation to determine if Service Recovery, including the use of a gift card, can express to the patient our desire to recover his/her confidence.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Patient/Customer expresses concern to a hospital staff member.
2. The Hospital employee will deal with the patient's/customer's concern promptly, at the point of contact and will refer to management staff only when unresolved or employee has deemed a situation that is not appropriate for Service Recovery through the **ReACT** process.
3. Any employee who encounters a patient/customer concern may resolve the concern independently by using the **ReACT** gift card from the Service Recovery Program. The employee should determine which gift card is most appropriate.
4. The Service Recovery Spreadsheet and Report form must be completed each time a gift card is provided to a patient/customer for tracking purposes. The form must be submitted immediately to the Department Supervisor and the QI/Risk Management Department.
5. The **ReACT** gift card is to be given to the patient/customer by the employee.
6. If the employee is concerned that the patient/customer may not be fully satisfied, he/she should notify his/her Department Supervisor as soon as possible.
7. Communication is the key to Service Recovery. Employees will communicate with those participating in the patient's care if Service Recovery is implemented. This is to ensure that Service Recovery continues throughout the entire hospital visit.
8. The goal of ALL employees is a patient or customer who is satisfied with the care and service of our hospital.

#### **MONITORING:**

Each month, the Service Excellence Team will review:

1. How the program is being used.
2. The expense associated with the program.
3. If the recovery program is improving our patients/customers perception of the care and service being provided.

Auditing of **ReACT** Service Recovery Toolkits:

1. Audit will be conducted by the QI/Risk Management Director
2. Audit will occur weekly and will be documented on the Service Recovery Spreadsheet.

