Are you Ready To Be Patient-Driven?

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Everyone is talking about ways to improve the patient experience. New initiatives, slogans, campaigns or programs of the month are introduced one after another but nothing seems to stick. Why? The answer may be because no one's really sure what patients want and so we just keep trying the next best thing in hopes that it will work.

About 15 years ago, many healthcare organizations jumped on the *"Patient-Centered Care"* bandwagon in a mission to put patients at the center of everything their employees said and did. While it may sound good on paper, consider the way a hospital or care facility removes trash, designs parking facilities, handles bill payment issues, or communicates with family members (and one another.) Are these things truly being handled in the best interests of the patient?

Fast forward a few years later, when a new trend emerged: *"Patient-First."* Again, this may look good on paper, but

what does it mean? Perhaps it requires organizations to make their employees park off-site so patients can have the first parking spots closest to the facility. Of course, that's a literal example of putting patients first, but it makes the point. Is this really what patients want? And what does patient-first really mean? If patients were in the same room as employees and were asked about a patient-first initiative, would they agree that everything is done with a spirit of putting them first?

The problem with each of these terms is that being patient-first or being patient-centered means organizations are making a guess or an assumption about what they think patients desire. But this assumption is akin to fool's gold. It looks shiny on the outside and is filled with good intentions, but it really doesn't have any value to patients or the patient experience.

Instead of guessing or assuming what patients want, there is a third alternative that offer more certainty. And there's one company outside the world of healthcare that has nearly perfected the art of knowing just what their customers want.

An Obsessive Focus: Putting Customers In the Driver's Seat

In 2016, Amazon accounted for more than half of all online sales compared to all other digital options. One of the reasons for their success is that Amazon is one of few organizations that has successfully figured out how to remove what they call the "friction points" in the customer experience.

Whether it's reducing delivery time or shipping costs, offering hard-to-find products at reasonable price points, and making re-ordering seamless, a recent article notes, "Amazon maintains an obsessive focus on removing every pain point from the buying experience."

How do they do this? Amazon's formula is simple. *They ask their customers what they want - and what they don't want -* and then they create an organizational culture that is built to support and deliver the desired customer experience.

In other words, they have successfully turned their business model into one that is not just customer-first or customer-centered; it's customer-driven.

We can do the same in healthcare.

The Secret to Patient-Driven Care
For decades, patients were little more than passive observers in all aspects of their care.

Now, they and their families want to be engaged, active participants in everything about the patient experience.

One way to engage patients is to ask them what they like or dislike. What's working and what isn't working. And what could be improved. Patient focus groups or advisory councils are great examples of a safe environment where an organization's leaders can move through every touchpoint on the patient experience journey and ask them what's working, what's not working, and what they think would make it better.

This is what is meant by being patient-driven.

It is literally putting patients in the driver's seat and actively soliciting their input to help improve every touchpoint on the patient experience.

It's especially important as organizations work to redo or revamp aspects of the patient experience or attempt to resolve a problem that has caused complaints. Instead of assuming or guessing what patients want (patient-first, patient-centered), organizations that are patient-driven rely on patients to share what their personal experience has been like and what specifically could be done to improve.

A caveat: Patient and employee experiences should not be designed to fit the organization (otherwise the organization gets lost in best intentions and becomes patient-centered or patient-first at best).

Positive customer and patient experiences will not magically happen simply by changing what we say or do.

Rather, the organization (and specifically the organization's culture) must be intentionally designed to deliver the desired experience of its patients.

This is what Amazon has done and as a result, they're at the top of the digital game and their reputation for customer service is outstanding.

The key is to continue to meet patient needs on the clinical side and to exceed patient expectations on the service side.

We do this by actively engaging patients and their families in the delivery of care. But it's not a one-time thing.

Organizations that are patient-driven (or customer-driven) know that it is a built-in continuous improvement process.

In order to be crystal clear on what patients want, organizations must check in regularly with patients to ensure the removal of any and all pain points of navigating the patient experience.

That is the key to being more than just patient-first or patient-centered; that is the key to being patient-driven.

Integrated Loyalty Systems has the proven blueprints needed to create patient-driven cultures that engage and empower every care team member to deliver exceptional patient experiences … *always.*
To learn more and to receive our FREE newsletter, email to info@wecreateloyalty.com, call (407) 859-2826 or visit wecreateloyalty.com