

Memorial Health System

Delivering an exceptional customer experience and an innovation culture.

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Most of us generally expect to see a strong focus on providing a superior customer experience from companies in industries like consumer products, banking or retail. In the health care industry, though, the customer relationship is much more complicated.

“There is a degree of uncertainty that health care facilities have to deal with—the patient outcome plays a critical factor in the relationship,” says Yvonne Nomizu, director of Service Innovation at Pacific Consulting Group, and leader of the CX Innovation Awards Committee for the Customer Experience Professionals Association (CXPA). In addition to providing quality care for patients’ physical well-being, health care facilities must also satisfy their emotional needs. Factors like the patient’s age, health status and ability to communicate have a key impact on how patients view their experience.

Delivering a superior customer experience while navigating the complexities of patient care requires innovative practices. And that is one of the reasons why Memorial Health System emerged as one of six organizations that were recently recognized for their customer experience innovations with the CXPA’s inaugural CX Innovation Award. The awards committee was particularly impressed with Memorial Health’s culture, which made it easy for the employees to live and breathe customer experience, Nomizu says.

Creating Chief Moment Officers

Memorial Hospital and Health System of South Bend (now part of Beacon Health System) is strongly committed to its core mission of creating exceptional experiences—which aligns closely with a culture focused on innovation. One of the driving forces behind Memorial Health’s customer experience focus is Chief Marketing, Innovation and Experience Officer Diane Stover. Stover is a master of innovation. She has spent the last two decades learning about and applying innovation models. She is a certified Experience Economy Expert and a WOW! Project Guru.

A few years ago, Stover and the leadership team at Memorial Health partnered with the Tom Peters Group to develop Wow! Project Training for its staff. A Wow! Project is described as one that is “revolutionary, beautiful, impactful, creates raving fans and is memorable,” and one that is high impact for a customer or an organization.

But Stover realized early on that not all of the hospital’s nonlicensed staff were fully aware of what their customer touchpoints were, or the impact that they had on the patient experience. To help staff identify the patient moments that they influenced every day, Stover integrated ideas from the Wow! Project methodology, and *The Experience Economy* (by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore), to develop Chief Moment Officer Training.

The training focuses on why patient experience is important, what the staff member’s role is in delivering that experience, the influence that they can have on the patient experience, and the science behind how to create exceptional experiences. Once employees have completed the training, there is a ceremony where they’re issued a Chief Moment Officer card. They also can then use CMO as an internal professional designation to verify that they have completed the training.

Empathy Boards Are Reminders of the Voice of the Patient

During Chief Moment Officer training, Memorial Health staff members learn how to provide a superior experience by gaining a deeper understanding of the patients’ perspective, their specific health issues and what they may be experiencing. As part of the training, staff members are presented with various patient scenarios—for instance, an elderly patient, a



Diane Stover

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young child, someone who’s hard of hearing, someone who doesn’t speak English well—along with a specific health issue or concern.

“Creating an experience has to be tailored to the needs of the individual, and everyone’s needs—or fears—are different,” Stover says. As they’re presented with the scenarios, staff members are asked to consider, based on their specific roles, how they would create an exceptional experience for each patient.

To reinforce the training, “empathy boards” are posted in all of the backstage areas, like storage rooms and break rooms. The empathy boards show photos of the different types of patients discussed in training, along with their situations. “They are ongoing reminders of the patient’s voice,” says Stover.

Sharing and Teaching Innovation Practices

In addition to Memorial Health’s exceptional internal focus on the patient experience, the organization has done an admirable job of evolving its innovation strategy from *learning* and *doing* to *teaching* by sharing their practices with other organizations, says Nomizu.


Memorial Health created its “Innovation Café” originally as a place for its staff members to work on their Wow! Projects and attend innovation classes. “It became clear to us that what we were teaching did not just apply to health care, so we decided to let people in our community sit in on the classes,” says Stover. Soon, hospitals around the country were knocking on Memorial Health’s doors. It responded by creating a day-long training session called, “A Day at the Innovation Café.” The sessions, which train leadership teams how to build an innovation culture, are held three or four times a year.

The requests to visit and learn continued to pour in, and eventually, with a generous financial gift from Richard J. Pfeil, one of the hospital’s top donors, Memorial Health built a second center. The Pfeil Innovation Center offers a two-day Innovation Leadership course with dates available throughout the year (www.wakeupandsmelltheinnovation.com).

In addition to the innovation learning centers, Stover and Philip Newbold, Memorial Health System’s president and CEO, decided to publish their experiences in a book. *Wake Up and Smell the Innovation!* is a how-to guide for creating an innovation culture. It includes the lessons the leadership team learned from their cross-country “Inno-Visits” with some of the most innovative companies in the world. The book also serves as the textbook for the innovation training that they offer.

Customer Experience Is Linked to Business Results

Companies are finally realizing the positive impact that customer experience innovation can have on the business, says Nomizu, adding that Memorial Health showed strong results, including increased patient satisfaction, a preferred employer designation, revenue growth, lower staff turnover and exceeding budget goals.

“People don’t expect health care to be focused on innovative practices,” Stover says. “We were able to learn and grow by looking at innovation through new lenses, and going to companies outside of our industry to see what new paradigms we might find.” 



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