

## Healthcare Providers' Impact on the Patient Experience: Is Anyone listening to Improve Quality and Safety?

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### Commentary

It was a personal experience in 2008 when my father was dying in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU), when I realized that what I had thought was an attribute of all healthcare professionals was really just a void in an organization's compassion in dealing with the family of a dying patient. What they lacked was the understanding of how important it is to keep the family involved while demonstrating genuine caring.

As a registered nurse for more than twenty years, I feel passionate that patient centered care includes the privilege to be part of the healing experience with patients and families. It wasn't until my father was nearing death when I experienced health care as the "family" during a difficult time. I realized the serious impact and devastating affect when the family is ignored. Quality and safety are so much more than just an aggregation and analysis of data.

While there are many dedicated health care professionals that practice patient-centered care everyday, there is a missed opportunity to "value" the experience when the behaviors are not consistent. There are many who work diligently to listen to and include the family in providing essential communication for safe and critical nursing or medical practice. We must hold healthcare professionals that fall short accountable so that the practice can be repeated each shift, every day, with each encounter.

I share this devastatingly painful experience as an opportunity for everyone that impacts patient lives. The perception of care means being involved to prevent another family from having their last memories surrounded by compounded anguish.

Quality and safety improves when patients, families and clinicians communicate well. The concept of encouraging patients and families to be involved in their health care is not new. In recent years it has taken center stage with more regulatory scrutiny. The purpose of this oversight is to assist with improving the patient environment and the experience as a means to improve safety and quality.

As a health care professional it is beyond my comprehension why other providers within the healthcare industry should not naturally demonstrate patient-centered care in day-to-day practice. Listening is an essential component of communication. The perception of the consumer is that health care providers struggle with this concept. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) uses the Hospital

Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) Survey: a survey to measure the patients' hospital experience. The first questions in the survey address the communication by the nurse and physician stating "communicating well means things were explained clearly, they listened carefully and the patients/families were treated with dignity and respect". This data is available to the public via the Hospital Compare Website ([www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov)). In 2007, The Joint Commission, an organization to help accredited healthcare establishments identify and improve patient safety, added to the list of established National Patient Safety Goals: Involving patients and families in their care as a means to improve and ensure safety. The standards are applicable for accreditation compliance but more importantly to reduce harm or prevent error by improving patient-provider communication.

Sadly, my father's last days of life were far from how he would have wanted. I had arrived from out of town to a locked facility, limited access, with no staff willing to share his change in condition, or allow me to be part of his care (turn him, comfort him) as he was restrained and intubated.

As a registered nurse in an administrative role, I have a firm understanding of workplace challenges. However, we have a duty and obligation to provide care that is patient-centered, providing reasonable friendly communication that is supportive in order to effectively engage the patient and family. It costs nothing to be compassionate. Yet, the repercussions of not listening can be devastating to the patient and family experience.

I want to make it clear and reiterate there are many healthcare providers that practice "putting the patient first". The Institute for Patient and Family Centered Care provides specific scenarios when harm was the end result and the family was not included in the plan of care. The Josey King story provides a tragic account of a toddler that received too much pain medication, which resulted in her death despite repeated cries to multiple healthcare providers to address the mother's concern.

Patient and families must partner with healthcare providers for more than improving satisfaction scores. Improving the experience, listening and more importantly substantially bettering quality and safety in the healthcare arena is an expectation of everyone.