

# Improving patient satisfaction through employee satisfaction: focus on nursing satisfaction with support services

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**Abstract:** The definition of patient care in today's hospital environment is transcending the clinical aspects of treating patients to emphasize a more holistic experience. As this perception of care is shifting, so is the composition of the care team.

Today, each element of the continuum, from the physicians to the support service teams, must work together as an interdependent group to achieve the best patient outcomes. To help build a more collaborative work environment, ARAMARK Healthcare set out to better understand the key opportunities to improve nursing satisfaction with support service teams.

Under the guidance of ARAMARK Healthcare and AONE (American Organization of Nurse Executives), nearly 50 Nursing Executives from across the US and Canada came together in November of 2006 to provide input on what a successful partnership between nursing and support services, such as patient transport, food, environmental and clinical technology services, would look like in the healthcare institution of the future.

Their input led to the development of the *Guiding Principles for Relationships among Nursing and Support Services in the Clinical Setting*. These guiding principles are intended to provide a roadmap for the creation of a stronger, more meaningful partnership between nursing and support services – a partnership that is ultimately focused on caring for patients and their families.

ARAMARK Healthcare is using the guiding principles as a basis to train its management and support service teams concerning the importance of the nursing/support service relationship and to raise sensitivity among its front line staff to some of the key issues. They are intended to inspire discussions among nurses and support service teams in a way that may not have taken place previously.

The guiding principles are outlined below:

## **Guiding Principle 1: Chief Nursing Officer as the catalyst for change**

- + Engage the senior executive team and Board to achieve partnership and leadership consensus in pursuit of new models.
- + Set clear expectations for a culture of inclusion and collaboration.
- + Exhibit leadership skills aligned with the AONE Nurse Executive Competencies.
- + Be visible and model collaborative behaviors such as structured rounding and appreciative inquiry.

## **Guiding Principle 2: Inclusive shared governance**

- + Create models of care that promote collaboration and

participation by nursing and support services groups.

- + Shift current paradigms to include support services as members of the patient care team that supports the environment.
- + Establish flexible organization structures that break down silos and create alignment.

## **Guiding Principle 3: Clear scope of practice**

- + Establish clear responsibilities, accountabilities, and applicable education for all team members – nursing and support services.
- + Focus nursing resources on clinical care functions; articulating what nurses can do against the perception of what they should do.
- + Facilitate professional development and talent management across the collaborative team.

## **Guiding Principle 4: Shared ownership of patient needs**

- + Develop realistic, mutually agreed upon goals that are measurable.
- + Align expectations across collaborative teams through a performance management system that rewards the relationship between nursing and support services.
- + Ensure that the patient experience is the focus of all services.
- + Help all staff, both nursing and support services, to find a sense of meaning and purpose in their work through patient-focused goals.

## **Guiding Principle 5: Culture of mutual respect and recognition**

- + Bridge gaps and barriers created by professional, cultural, and generational differences.
- + Cultivate sincere, authentic relationships that are grounded in trust and respect.
- + Encourage a sense of equity and facilitate shared appreciation of nursing and support service jobs.

- ✦ Reward and recognize all members of the team for their impact on the patient experience.

**Guiding Principle 6: Safer, less stressful physical environment**

- ✦ Provide a healing environment that is suited to the shared purpose of caring for patients and their families.
- ✦ Enable nurses to spend more time with patients by keeping supplies and equipment at hand and bringing services to the patient.
- ✦ Create a work environment that addresses the physical and emotional needs of staff.
- ✦ Optimize technology to enable collaboration, communication, service provision, and culture change.

**Guiding Principle 7: Continuous, open communication**

- ✦ Develop a common, patient-focused language that can be used by both nursing and support services groups.
- ✦ Establish a communication plan that disseminates key messages and decisions to all levels – in both nursing and support services.
- ✦ Implement mechanisms to measure and act on interdepartmental satisfaction and feedback.
- ✦ Communicate in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

**Continuing to build on the momentum**

After gaining initial insight into the issues, ARAMARK Healthcare and AONE, along with a consulting firm called the Studer Group, partnered on a joint research project designed to better understand nursing relationships with key clinical support functions and how to innovatively strengthen these relationships.

This portion of the work led to the development of a first-of-its-kind survey instrument to measure nursing satisfaction with support services. This phase of the work included survey feedback from more than 1,300 nurses across the United States, who identified several gaps in nursing's needs from support services vs. the performance that they are presently receiving. Among the gaps are:

- ✦ Frees up our time so we can do our jobs.
- ✦ Takes personal accountability when tasks are not completed.
- ✦ Lets others know when and if there will be a delay.
- ✦ Consistently has adequate number of staff to do the job we need.

In addition, a number of trends emerged from the data that are important to nurses when working with support service groups. These are:

- ✦ Communication.
- ✦ Team Work/Adaptability.
- ✦ Availability/Accessibility of Staff and Resources.
- ✦ Timeliness.
- ✦ Compassion/Consideration/Positive Approach/Professionalism.
- ✦ Knowledge.
- ✦ Proactive behaviour.
- ✦ Coordination of Care (throughput).
- ✦ Responsibility/Accountability.

Nurses also identified a number of critical needs that must be met by support service groups. These needs are baseline “must

have” that are essential to good nursing/support service relationships. They are:

- ✦ Interacts with others in a positive manner.
- ✦ Performs duties correctly.
- ✦ Provides us with important resources.
- ✦ Contributes to providing a safe environment.

**Phase II work**

To begin applying guiding principles and nursing satisfaction survey on a large scale ARAMARK Healthcare in the spring of 2008 entered Phase II of the project. The goal of this work at each hospital is to identify site specific gaps and to translate the learning into opportunities to improve nursing satisfaction with support services.

More than 6,000 nurses provided feedback through the nursing satisfaction survey tool. Participating hospitals include a range of both ARAMARK Healthcare partners and non-partners. Survey enrolment, administration, data collection and reporting will be handled by Intelscan, Inc., an independent third-party research firm.

The nursing satisfaction survey tool was administered online; and to ensure that the survey process has the support to succeed within each hospital, ARAMARK Healthcare coordinated with nurse leaders to advocate and communicate the project within their organizations. Communication materials including posters, e-mail and talking points were provided to help nurse leaders encourage participation.

At the end of the project in 2008, ARAMARK Healthcare partners who are participating in the study will receive a tool kit and strategies to help close any gaps that the surveys reveal to help them better align with the guiding principles. Non-partners also will be encouraged to use the feedback to develop action plans to improve nursing satisfaction with support services.

**Beta site learning**

To test the process for Phase II, ARAMARK Healthcare initiated a Beta project in the fall of 2007. A community based hospital located in the Mid West was selected as the Beta site. This hospital also participated in Phase I of the national nursing satisfaction project.

ARAMARK Healthcare's Organizational Development team facilitated the work. This team uses adult learning, management science, training, change management, and systems thinking to addresses how change will impact the environment and critical stakeholders. The group teaches leadership and employees to overcome any resistance to change by alleviating learning anxiety and also coaches front line leadership on how to define the strategy, inspire the vision, and enable others to act.

The organizational development team was instrumental in forming a steering committee at the Beta site to gain feedback from both the nursing leadership as well as the leaders of the respective support service groups. One of the first steps was to create a tool and pre-assess the hospital's alignment with *The Guiding Principles for Relationships among Nursing and Support Services in the Clinical Setting*.

While the Beta hospital scored fairly high overall in terms of nursing satisfaction with support services, the assessment identified opportunities to improve alignment by focusing on the three guiding principles listed below:

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- + **Clear scope of practice** – this principle is geared to establishing responsibilities, accountability and education. It also is intended to help focus nursing resources on clinical care functions and it articulates what nurses can do against the perception of what they should do.
- + **Culture of mutual respect and recognition** – this principle suggests bridging gaps and barriers created by professional, cultural and generational differences. It recommends cultivating sincere, authentic relationships grounded in trust and respect; encourages a sense of equity and facilitates shared appreciation of nursing and support service jobs. It also recommends rewarding and recognizing all members of the team for their impact on the patient experience.
- + **Continuous open communication** – ideas outlined within this principle include developing a common, patient focused

language that can be used by both nursing and support service groups; establishing a communication plan that disseminates key messages and decisions to all levels; implementing mechanisms to measure and act on interdepartmental satisfaction and feedback; and communicate in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

#### **Continuing to build on the body of work**

The initial focus of all of this work was geared to understanding the nurse's perspective regarding support services, but some of the most frequent feedback that is voiced by nurse leaders is geared to gaining the perspective of the support service leadership.

ARAMARK Healthcare is also exploring this side of the relationship. In fact, the company recently conducted a series of focus groups with support service leaders at hospitals across the country to help to better understand their perspective.

In addition, ARAMARK Healthcare and AONE are planning a second conference in the fall of 2008 involving Chief Nurse Executives and hospital support service leaders. The first conference in 2006 resulted in the development of the guiding principles. The primary objectives of the second conference will be to identify the role that support services can play in creating a more collaborative environment, and to explore the further development of tools for implementing the guiding principles. □

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