Evaluating the Effectiveness of Empathy Huddles on HCAHPS Scores

- Saint Luke’s Hospital is a not-for-profit tertiary referral center that is a member of the 10-hospital Saint Luke’s Health System in Kansas City, Missouri.

- 4,024 employees, 697 physicians, 562 staffed beds, 22,571 hospital admissions, 40,349 emergency department visits, 120 residents/fellows.
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Background and Significance

• There were several nursing units that were struggling with patient experience results. The comments made by patients pointed toward a possible lack of empathy from the staff toward the patients. It was then conceptualized that the staff could benefit from reminders of the patient’s perspective.

• Customer service training is usually done in orientation and then not again in a career or not very often. It was felt that a weekly intervention aimed at improving empathy and concentrating on a patient-centered theme would be helpful.

• The Empathy Huddles were created.
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**Definition**

- For the purpose of this project, empathy is defined as “the capacity to: (a) be affected by and share the emotional state of another,
- (b) assess the reason for the other’s state, and
- (c) identify with the other, adopting his or her perspective.”

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Methods

The Empathy Huddles began January 2017. Baseline HCAHPS patient experience scores were compared to pre and post implementation of the Empathy Huddle intervention. Scores for the following HCAHPS questions were collected:

1) How often did the nurses treat you with courtesy and respect?
2) How often did nurses listen carefully to you?
3) How often did nurses explain things in a way you could understand?
4) After you pressed your call button, how often did you get help as soon as you wanted it?
5) Before giving you any new medicine, how often did hospital staff tell you what the medicine was for?
Methods

For an entire quarter, the Patient Experience Coordinator (PEC) implemented weekly Empathy Huddles. Each Empathy Huddle was focused on a different empathy theme with emphasis on patient centered care. A whiteboard was put in each unit’s breakroom to display the theme for the week as a visual reminder to staff. Supplemental tangible items were provided to staff during the huddles to be used as reminders to be empathetic.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of themes include</th>
<th>Examples of tangibles include</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Smooth pebbles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Heart charms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being present</td>
<td>Aromatherapy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell the patient you love what you do</td>
<td>Awesome stickers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building trust/relationship – ask about their pets</td>
<td>Animal crackers</td>
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Empathy Huddle Implementation Top Box Score

- Courtesy and Respect: 90.2 pre, 86.2 post
- Nurses Listening: 62.5 pre, 80.4 post
- Staff Explained New Meds: 59.0 pre, 83.2 post
- Clear Comm by Nurses: 74.0 pre, 79.0 post
- Timely Response to Call Buttons: 30.2 pre, 59.1 post
- Overall Rating: 66.2 pre, 82.6 post

Mean score pre-implementation Oct-Dec 16
Mean score post implementation Jan-Mar 17
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Staff interviews

• “Just always keep in mind that empathy is an incredibly important thing in nursing and just to know that some of these patients that you work with are going through incredibly difficult times, and not to take things they may do and say to you personally, and just keep everything in perspective, that you are here to take care of them and not judge them.”

• “So I’m grateful for them (Empathy Huddles). They’re a good reminder at the beginning of the day to just be mindful of whatever the theme is.”
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Staff interviews

• “I think that having something tangible is always a good idea for people just to make that next connection, and it just kind of solidifies whatever you’re trying to teach a little bit better.”

• “I think they are almost imperative to have…you get so busy and you have so much information you are taking in that you really need it.”

• “…this floor can get hectic sometimes and we have to remind each other like it’s going to be a good day. Do you need anything? If we see one of us getting overwhelmed, you need me to do something, just so we can ease this load.”
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Discussion

• Empathy Huddles have the capacity to influence staff’s empathy towards patients, families and coworkers.

• Hearing actual patient stories further helped the staff to connect with their patients’ experiences.

• When process improvement is necessary, the huddles can provide an impetus for a culture shift from within, by inspiring positive interactions among staff and their patients.
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