Patient Experience Defined by The Beryl Institute
Institute offers starting point for discussions on this critical healthcare issue

Dallas, TX (September 14, 2010) -- If you search Google or elsewhere for the latest in healthcare trends, “patient experience” is bound to pop up, but its definition is fuzzy. The Beryl Institute, an organization devoted to producing resources and research on the patient experience, has collaborated with healthcare professionals and practitioners at hospitals around the country to develop a definition.

Patient Experience -- *The sum of all interactions, shaped by an organization's culture, that influence patient perceptions across a continuum of care.*

“The entire industry has dramatically increased its focus on the patient experience and service with the emergence of the HCAHPS survey as a standard and publically reported measure.” said Jason Wolf, Executive Director of The Beryl Institute. HCAHPS, the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems survey, consists of 27 questions that cover everything from the cleanliness of the patient room to nurse-patient communications to pain management. The survey must be administered to patients 48 hours to six weeks following discharge. He noted both the current requirement to publically report HCAHPS scores or lose reimbursement and the pending changes that will tie the amount of reimbursement directly to levels of service performance, have spurred a groundswell of activity. Yet it seems healthcare organizations still struggle with exactly what to do.

Wolf believes The Beryl Institute’s efforts to define patient experience is a significant first step in addressing this issue. “It is through definition that we create a standard by which to understand, act and measure. If an organization is on the path to improve the patient experience, it needs to know what it is attempting to change,” said Wolf. He believes patient responses to survey questions can be positively influenced if healthcare organizations develop a standard framework to help drive their interactions with patients.

“Because each healthcare institution is unique, the application of the definition may vary slightly. However, we see The Beryl Institute’s definition serving as an industry standard and providing a framework for action plans focused on improving the patient experience,” said Wolf. He suggests that having a common definition for patient experience can serve as a guide for how a hospital supports patients. “A 2008 study by Avers, a global strategy company, asserted that organizations that use a clear definition for customer experience to guide every-day decisions are more profitable than those that don’t. It stands to reason that hospitals that develop their own institutional definitions for patient experience will ultimately be more successful in implementing and sustaining patient experience improvement efforts, as well as quality and safety efforts than those that do not.”

Wolf expects adoption of the definition to be high, given it was created as a collaborative effort between The Beryl Institute and a group of patient experience professionals throughout the United States. The group, brought together by the Institute, met virtually multiple times throughout the summer to arrive at the definition. It was then reviewed with a number of other patient experience leaders.
Participants appreciated the opportunity to brainstorm and network with other patient experience professionals and many plan to integrate the definition into their organizations. As stated by Marsha Price, Director of Service Improvement, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, “The patient experience group has been nothing less than inspiring. Vanderbilt will use this [definition] as a starting point for defining our strategic approach and long term direction.”

Mary Ann Dragon, RN, BSN, MBA, Director of Patient and Family Services at University Hospitals, Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospitals in Cleveland states, “This definition will be valuable in our ongoing dialogue and education of staff and families about our commitment to listening to, including and communicating with each patient and family as their care plan is defined and designed.”

Similarly, Juan Luna, Patient Experience Coordinator, Medical Center of Arlington says, “I plan to incorporate the definition in all patient experience initiatives. From reorganizing and restructuring new employee orientation to ongoing training for all current employees, the ideals in the definition will support the basis for our development efforts.”

Workgroup participants included:

Paul Clarke, Director of Patient Satisfaction, NCH Healthcare System
Veronica Cochran, Director, Office of Patient Centeredness, Baylor Health Care Systems
Mary Ann Dragon, Director, Patient and Family Services, University Hospitals of Cleveland
Marsha Price, Director of Service Improvement, Vanderbilt University Medical Center
Pam Sandy, Ambassador & Customer Service Support, Memorial Hospital Of South Bend
Jennifer Wagner, Customer Experience Manager, Halifax Health Medical Center
Stacie Whiting, Customer Experience Coordinator, Ephrata Community Hospital
Jason Wolf, Executive Director, The Beryl Institute

Wolf added, “At The Beryl Institute, we will use this definition ourselves as well. It will serve as a guide for how we build resources for our members and as the standard for how we support and advocate for the creation of a positive patient experience across all healthcare organizations.”

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About The Beryl Institute:

The Beryl Institute serves as a professional home for stakeholders who recognize that the patient experience is an essential element in the execution and evaluation of health care performance. The Institute is committed to improving the patient experience, by serving as a reliable resource for shared information and proven practices, a dynamic incubator of leading research and new ideas and an interactive connector of effective leaders and dedicated practitioners. The Institute is uniquely positioned to develop and publicize cutting-edge concepts focused on improving the patient experience, touching thousands of healthcare executives and patients.

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