INTERVIEW
WITH JASON WOLF

MORE THAN JUST SEEING A PATIENT

Learning about the expectations of patients and their families is essential for managing possible frustrations and setting a line between what is possible and what is desirable.

The Beryl Institute is the global community for the discussion and development of strategies to realize and fulfill the expectation of patients and their families in terms of service quality and care in general. Its founder, Jason Wolf, was in São Paulo in June, invited by Hospital Israelita Albert Einstein, for the 1st Latin American Symposium on Patient Experience.

He spoke to almost 700 people about the engagement of professionals and how to use patient closeness to educate patients.

In this exclusive interview to Melhores Práticas, he highlights how the systemic perspective proposed by the Patient Experience concept reinforces the purpose and commitment of healthcare professionals.
In your presentation, you highlight patient experience depends on physician involvement, staff retention and motivation, the institution’s values and focus on the patient. As these are not necessarily new topics, what does the Patient Experience offer?

Traditionally, healthcare is built based on the perspective of healthcare providers. However, we never think of the outside, in the perspective of what is important for the patient. This idea led us to the provision of a segmented service, as if it was comprised of silos. The patient experience addresses these unconnected cares, a sort of an umbrella, allowing to align the conversation with broader purposes. This way, when we started to link everything into a single unit, around the experience we want to promote, we could see better the efficiencies, cost management and clinical decisions. The Patient Experience is not a new creative concept, but a new lens through which we can apply the concepts we already know.

And how do we know what is important for the patient?

By asking and establishing efficient communication channels, such as surveys, focus groups, ombudsman and social media. Current and old patients and their families should be heard. It’s a layer-based approach because you need to constantly question the situation. Besides, the institution should first clearly define the type of experience it wants to provide its patients and the community.

The reality is that, when we ask about their expectations, we increase the level of the conversation to the extent that we can set with the patient what can or cannot be done and why.

Aren’t the expectations of healthcare providers and patients the same?

They are basically similar. We’re human beings, and, in this work, our core values are consistent. But, as healthcare providers, we have systematic restrictions about the operation of our system, considering everything it allows us to do. And in the mind of a patient or family member, an image is created about how care should be received or how things could be done. Then, there is a difference in terms of expectations. Some of my strategies refer to how to increases the expectations of both sides.

Don’t increasing expectations help make people dissatisfied?

I don’t think so. Healthcare systems have the obligation to educate. It’s not about doing what the patient wants, but what should be done, according to the system limitations, and considering the clinical view and recognizing that it’s important for the patient. Then, for example, if a patient has free expectations, I should feel comfortable to inform him why I cannot fulfill all of them. Then, when he comes back, he’ll probably know. Even when they don’t like the answer, they feel respected when they are heard.

Then, is transparency the key?

Exactly. Transparency is about making health services accessible, not only in terms of cost, but also in terms of understanding. Then, when we talk about expectations, we educate them on more critical aspects and help patients and their families identify what is important and what can be left aside.
This communication depends on a health professional who is often unmotivated and stressed, or even poorly remunerated. How to prepare health professionals?

It doesn’t matter what the system is like around the world, this concept of compassion, fatigue and exhaustion is tangible. Healthcare providers have many simultaneous tasks and responsibilities. For this reason, it is very important to reinforce, all the time, the purpose of this work, and show how they contribute to healthy financial organizations and loyalty of patients and communities. It’s the purpose that makes most people choose the health area, in the first place.

I usually say it’s very difficult to train people and make them behave in different ways they are not used to. It’s possible to teach certain skills and tactics, but, at the end of the day, we’ll have to find the right health professionals to assimilate and ensure the type of experience we want.

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THE BERYL INSTITUTE, AN ACCELERATOR OF IDEAS

Jason Wolf explains the Beryl Institute as a platform on which ideas are changed into shared knowledge. “We are neither a consulting firm nor an association. I’d say we’re a combination of community and opinion-shaping organization. Then, we work to pull down barriers between organizations and create an environment of global collaboration and idea sharing.”

The institute is funded by contributions from associates, sponsors, revenues from events and other products for education. The website shows case studies, videos, research and vast materials about patient experience.

READ MORE

Read more about patient experience on issue 16 of Melhores Práticas magazine: Special – Patient-Centered Care.