

A photograph of a female healthcare professional with curly brown hair, wearing a white lab coat over blue scrubs, smiling warmly at an elderly patient. The patient is partially visible on the right side of the frame. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window.

5 Ways to Improve Patient Satisfaction

HOW RECOGNITION CAN LIFT YOUR EMPLOYEES –
AND YOUR HCAHPS SCORES

workhuman*



There's a lot riding on HCAHPS scores. Patients can research and choose healthcare organizations that receive the best ratings. And organizations with high scores are reimbursed at a higher rate by Medicare. For those reasons and others, scoring well on HCAHPS has a proven and significant impact on the bottom line.

So what's the secret to improving patient satisfaction – and your healthcare organization's HCAHPS scores? Experts say success lies in first raising employee satisfaction levels. And one of the most effective ways to do that is by creating a culture of recognition.

By building a culture in which recognition is celebrated, you'll be taking care of the people who take care of your patients. And as research has shown, there's a direct and significant correlation between employee and patient satisfaction.

Here are five ways healthcare organizations can build a culture of recognition and improve patient satisfaction.

“70% of employees at Baystate Health agree that receiving recognition encourages them to work harder for patients, customers, and team members.”

JENNIFER FAULKNER
Baystate Health
in HRTech Outlook

1. Raise employee engagement

Lack of engagement continues to be a widespread problem in the healthcare arena. According to the [Quantum Workplace healthcare engagement report](#), only 57% of healthcare workers are engaged at work, and 13% are actively disengaged or hostile.

One of the most effective ways to boost employee engagement? Building a culture that recognizes the daily sacrifices, dedication, and commitment of your healthcare workers.

[“The Employee Experience of Healthcare Workers,”](#) a research study by Workhuman® and the IBM® Smarter Workforce Institute, found that when employees agree they receive recognition for doing good work, 85% report a more positive employee experience – versus only 47% when they do not agree.

That’s the kind of impact recognition can have. An impact that’s proven to translate directly into greater employee engagement. And greater patient satisfaction.

“We have always found when our employee engagement scores go up, our patient satisfaction goes up, as well as our physicians’ satisfaction. So all those things move in tandem.”

Roseann Kobialka
AtlantiCare, in a [Workhuman interview](#)



2. Encourage better communication

Six of the ten measures on HCAHPS are directly related to communication. Yet in diverse, dynamic, and stressful healthcare settings, the ability to hear, listen, and connect with others can be a challenge.

A culture in which great ideas and great actions are recognized helps encourage workers to voice concerns, suggest improvements, and communicate freely with people at all levels of the organization. The social component of a comprehensive recognition program fosters such a culture: When others throughout an organization can see and celebrate the ideas and achievements of their peers, communication flourishes.





“We need to have conversations with clinicians about what matters to them, and work with them to identify what gets in the way. This gives staff some space to find the energy to improve care.”

BARBARA BALIK, RN, EDD
Senior Faculty at the Institute for
Healthcare Improvement

Of course, infusing into your culture honest, two-way feedback is another highly effective way to improve communication. By promoting a continuous performance management model — facilitated with solutions such as Workhuman’s Conversations® — healthcare organizations can foster a culture that celebrates feedback and communication and lets every worker support, mentor, and reward others.

By creating a culture of recognition and feedback, healthcare organizations can greatly improve communication. And that translates into the kind of care that boosts HCAHPS scores.

3. Reduce mistakes and increase patient safety

“Some studies suggest that as many as 400,000 deaths occur in the United States each year as a result of errors or preventable harm,” according to the [Institute for Healthcare Improvement](#).

Patient safety is a cornerstone metric in evaluating the quality of a healthcare organization. And here’s where a culture of recognition once again comes to the fore. Such a culture forges strong relationships, promotes better communication, and encourages teamwork – all factors in creating a workplace dynamic where the safety of patients is a top priority.



“Researchers have found that working together reduces the number of medical errors and increases patient safety.”

[HRH Global Resource Center](#)



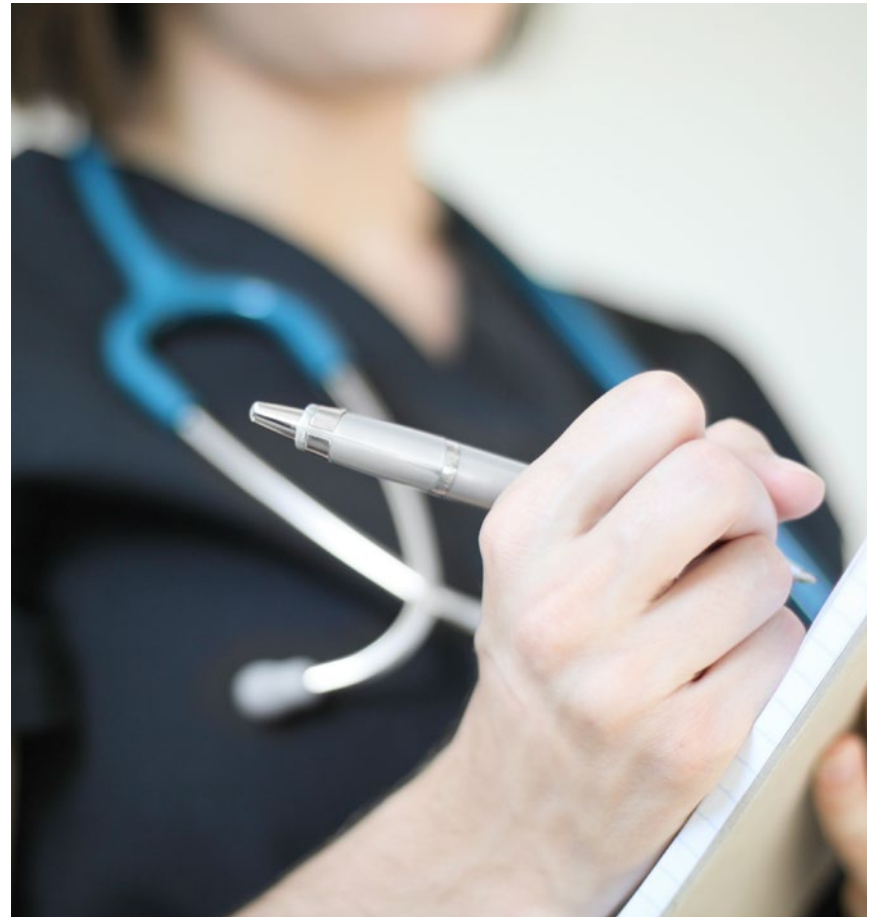
And as we've noted above, recognition drives employee engagement – a vital factor in keeping patients safe. A [study by Gallup](#) has linked higher nurse engagement to reduced patient mortality, and at least one study has shown a rise in engagement scores reduces patient falls by 81% and medical errors by 32%.

A culture of recognition and feedback – in which employees are strongly engaged and communicate and coordinate dynamically – is a culture in which fewer mistakes are made.

4. Build accountability

One of the centerpieces of an effective, comprehensive recognition program is its ability to align employees with your organization's mission, values, and goals. It enables each employee to understand, reinforce, and evangelize the values your organization cherishes.

And if a core value of your healthcare organization is "accountability," employee recognition can be a powerful tool in advancing that tenet. A recognition program maps accountability – and all your organizational values – onto employees' everyday thoughts and actions.





“Creating a culture of accountability is necessary for advancing an organization and sustaining your change efforts. You improve engagement and strengthen performance when there is a sense of mutual responsibility within the team.”

“How Leaders Create a Culture of Accountability in Health Care,”
Harvard Business Review

In addition, accountability is closely aligned with empowerment – one of the four essential components that help build employee engagement. In fact, “empowerment is the foundation of accountability,” according to Eric Mosley and Derek Irvine in “Making Work Human.” As they note, “Empowerment nurtures and sustains engagement over the long run.”


That’s important because, as we’ve seen, engagement – bolstered by a culture of recognition – is a key driver in boosting patient satisfaction.

5. Encourage enthusiasm and positivity

“What makes hospital employees – especially clinicians – happy at work and engaged in their jobs?” asks John Rossheim in his [Workhuman blog](#). “Sound organizational processes to self-evaluate the work environment and effect change can improve employee satisfaction, and therefore patient satisfaction and fiscal health.”

Despite its many benefits, HCAHPS – like any scoring system – adds more stress to an already stressful job. To avoid emotional burnout – made even more challenging during the pandemic – it’s important that organizations refill the coffers of goodwill for their employees by creating a culture of recognition and feedback.





"There are a couple of decades of evidence that happier hospital employees raise HCAHPS scores and improve patient safety and outcome quality."

BARBARA BALIK, RN, EDD
Senior Faculty at the Institute for
Healthcare Improvement

As John Rossheim points out, "One key component to positive change for clinicians and their patients is employee recognition, which can in turn help to boost HCAHPS scores."

By offering healthcare workers frequent positive recognition and creating an environment that is filled with support and feedback, you'll go a long way towards building a workplace culture in which employees are enthusiastic, positive, and happy.

And one where patient safety and satisfaction thrives.

"Savvy institutions can see that HCAHPS scores ... are dependent on the satisfaction and engagement of [a] key constituency: these healthcare providers' own employees."

JOHN ROSSHEIM

Healthcare editor, business writer, journalist

[Workhuman blog](#)

Forward-thinking HR leaders know:

Now is the time to think about the lessons you have learned in the past year. Let them inform and guide you as you improve the engagement of your healthcare employees – and the satisfaction of your patients.

Because improving patient satisfaction – and your healthcare organization's HCAHPS scores – begins by creating a culture of recognition through a [values-based employee recognition program](#), built on world-class technology such as [Workhuman's Social Recognition®](#) platform.

We can help. Every step of the way.

Reach out today to request a demo or get started with the [Workhuman Cloud®](#).

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