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Enhanced Patient-Centered Culture

Ronald L Dearinger, University of Florida

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Administrator’s View: Growing an Enhanced Patient-Centered Culture Within a Clinical Department at an Academic Medical Center

By Ron Dearinger

Administrator

Webster’s Dictionary defines accountability as “subject to having to report, explain, or justify: being answerable, responsible.” The Oz Principle (2) redefines accountability as, “a personal choice to rise above one’s circumstances and demonstrate the ownership necessary for achieving desired results.” Additionally, the Oz Principle espouses the idea that accountability is most effective when people in an organization share ownership of circumstances and results. This is an aspect the customary definition of accountability fails to take into account as it assigns sole responsibility to the individual without acknowledging the shared accountability that typifies organizational behavior.

Just like Dorothy’s search for the Wizard of Oz for enlightenment, individuals and organizations also seek out the wizard that will save them from the maladies that afflict their workplace. However, the wizard is just a distraction. And, just as the characters in the famous story ultimately discover that their victim mentality was their greatest stumbling block and that their heart’s desire was always within reach, the authors exhort individuals, work teams and organizations to rise above the thin line that separates high performance and delighted patients from organizational and individual mediocrity.

Above The Line, you’ll find the Steps to Accountability which include in chronological order: See It, Own It, Solve It, and Do It. The first step, “See It”, means acknowledging the problem; to “Own It” is to assume responsibility for the problem and the results; “Solve It” means to formulate solutions to remedy the situation; and, as a culminating step, “Do It” commands the practical application of the solutions identified.

Below The Line is where the self-professed victims play the blame game. Here, crippling attitudes such as “Wait and See”, “Confusion”, “Tell Me What To Do”, “It’s Not My Job”, “Ignore/Deny”, “Finger Pointing”, and “Cover Your Tail” are rampant. Though the majority of the people found in this dimension are weak in accountability, this does not mean that very
accountable individuals are exempt from falling *Below The Line*. They too slip every now and then. The difference is that they know how to get out of the rut.

Using the Oz Principle as a framework, department leadership can charter a cross-functional group of point-of-service employees, supervisors, and leaders. This group is referred to as the Culture Change Team, whose primary goal is to be the champions of change that will ensure the delivery of sustained exemplary patient-centered care. External consultants can be engaged to facilitate a retreat to formally establish the roles and the vision of what exemplary patient-centered care would look and feel like, from the perspectives of providers and patients. They described an environment as being inviting for patients and staff, with operations being efficiently performed. The Culture Change Team also described a place where those who came for care and those who provided that care felt an overall sense of pride as well as pride in their contributions. They described teamwork, professionalism, competence and confidence among the staff members, and an atmosphere where everyone focused on the patients and their care. They identified specific patient centered behaviors such as: making the patient the center of attention, greeting patients as though you’re genuinely glad to see them, listening, clarifying expectations, maintaining good eye contact, and being available by phone with patients. The team also described enhanced communications behaviors that kept staff naturally and easily “in the loop” regarding patient needs so they could better assist as needed. The group selected integrity, efficiency, teamwork, compassion, and communication as essential values to ensure quality patient care and keep the organization functioning above the line. While it is important to know where you’re headed, the journey to get there requires focus and commitment. The Culture Change Team members committed to “do what it takes” during the initial retreat, as did employee groups early on in the process. Areas for ongoing focus were identified as: education and training, problem solving, measurement, and communication. Additional outreach to patients and potential patients will be achieved through a series of focus groups led by the external consulting group and Community Strategies. Training will also be provided for employees over and beyond the standard curriculum provided by current organizational structure. Feedback from across the department indicates that focused training on dealing with frustrated patients, conflict resolution, and enhanced communication will assist in developing and sustaining the quality of patient-centered experience envisioned by the top administration. The Culture Change Team is moving
the ideas incorporated in the Oz Principle into the daily activities that will contribute to a better aligned process, more responsive systems, and Departmental employees that consistently make our patients the most comfortable, most welcomed and most secure in the care they receive.

References:


2. The Oz Principle: Getting results through individual and organizational accountability, Roger Connors, Tom Smith, and Craig Hickman, Penguin Group, 2004