

# HOW TO IMPROVE **Patient Satisfaction and HCAHPS Scores:**

ACTIONABLE IDEAS & EXAMPLES







**There is a fundamental behavioral shift happening in healthcare. Patients are taking control of their healthcare journeys—researching hospitals and providers, learning about their conditions and studying their treatment options—before even setting foot in your facility.**

In fact, 92 percent of [healthcare consumers feel that improving customer experience should be a top priority for providers](#). According to the survey, healthcare consumers feel hospitals and physicians should offer things like a variety of virtual access points, online bill pay and price transparency, among other things. However, in that same survey, only 9 percent of hospitals and physicians surveyed said they could successfully offer the experiences consumers were expecting.

But patient satisfaction goes beyond offering patients the latest technologies and amenities. Patients also must feel they are being respected, their needs are being met and the facility where they received care is clean and well run.



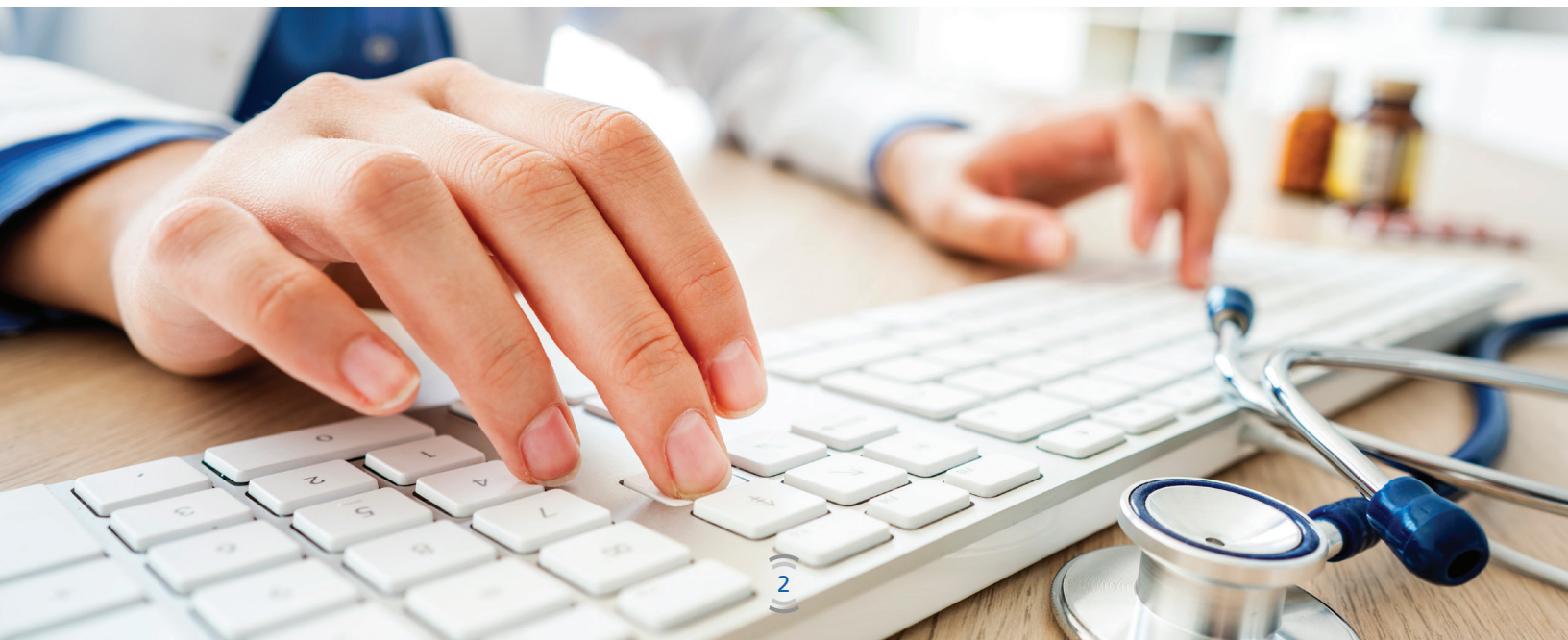
**This guide will give you actionable steps you can take today to start improving your patient satisfaction and HCAHPS scores, as well as real life examples from hospitals that have improved their scores to inspire you.**

# Patient Satisfaction and the Role of HCAHPS

**The Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems survey, or HCAHPS, is designed to:**

- Produce comparable data on patients' perspectives of care
- Create an incentive for hospitals to improve quality of care through the public reporting of results
- Increase transparency by enhancing public accountability in healthcare

A low HCAHPS score can mean your hospital loses reimbursement from CMS and market share. Not only that, satisfied patients are more likely to be compliant, which can reduce readmission rates.



# 5 Ways to Increase Your HCAHPS Score

## 1: EXAMINE YOUR COMMUNICATION

Communication between providers and patients, as well as among providers, is a foundational element of a positive patient experience. It's imperative hospitals understand how their physicians and staff are performing. Consider doing your own survey following patient stays or, better yet, survey them during evening rounds. During those conversations, be sure to ask patients questions such as:

- Whether nurses and physicians explained things in a way they could understand
- Whether staff listened carefully to them
- Whether they were told where they could receive help—and for what symptoms—after discharge

While safe, quality care is expected at hospitals, it's how they were treated—if the doctor sat down and explained treatment options to them, for example—that sets hospitals apart in the patient's eyes.





## A Case Study: Rush Medical Center

The HCAHPS [communication score for Rush Medical Center's hospitalists was around the seventh percentile nationally](#). To raise its score, the facility sought to improve hospitalist-patient communication using initiatives including:



### Hospitalist facecards

These were two-sided cards that contained information on the hospitalist, his or her contact information and photo. They were handed to patients to help initiate conversations about the hospitalist's role and his or her responsibility around care coordination.



### A best practices checklist

This checklist was centered around the doctor/patient communication questions on the survey, was distributed to hospitalists and included points like:

- Greet patient by name
- Ask open-ended questions at the end of an encounter
- Update nursing staff daily on plan of care
- Avoid interruptions while speaking with patients
- Explain things clearly, avoiding medical jargon



### Communication style feedback

The facility initially created communication simulations for the hospitalists and provided feedback on what they saw. This was replaced by observation in clinical settings by psychologists who later provide feedback in private sessions. Rush Medical Center also solicits feedback from patients and shares it with the hospitalist.



### A culture of transparency

How the checklists were used, feedback from communication observation and individual HCAHPS scores were shared and reviewed at monthly division meetings.

## THE RESULT?

**Rush Medical Center's HCAHPS hospitalist communication score rose from the seventh to the 66th percentile.**

## 2: COLLECT, EXAMINE AND SHARE DATA

Simply looking at your HCAHPS survey results can provide you with a wealth of information, but to really make a lasting improvement, you will want to analyze and act on all data from the patient experience. This can include data collected from follow-up phone calls, feedback given to staff or from additional surveys. Once you know what areas are most important to patients, create projects to address them.



### **What you learn may surprise you.**

When the Cleveland Clinic wanted to improve its HCAHPS score, it asked leaders in its emergency department what they thought the biggest patient complaint was. The leaders shared they thought the wait times were the biggest issue. However, once the Clinic looked at data and information obtained from focus groups, the facility found the most important issue for patients was the concern and caring from staff, and that wait times were last on the list.

### 3: TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR FACILITY

While the bulk of HCAHPS questions are focused on provider-patient communication, some are focused on the hospital environment itself, particularly its cleanliness and noise level. The American Hospital Association (AHA) notes that [noise levels can cause loss of sleep and even interfere with the healing process](#). Noise levels, in fact, are among the [top complaints on HCAHPS scores](#), according to Healthcare Finance. Not only does the noise level at hospitals impede patients' ability to rest and recover, it also has an impact on staff—creating alarm fatigue and negatively impacting communication.

#### Reducing the Noise Level: Two Approaches

Hospitals have been developing noise control strategies that fall into two categories: administrative interventions and engineering interventions.

Engineering interventions are focused on finding ways to make the room quieter. This could entail things like closing a patient's door, installing noise absorption devices within the room or installing alarms to sound at the nurses' station rather than the patient's bedside. Administrative interventions focus on behavioral changes and could include established quiet hours or keeping voices low when a patient is resting.

#### Real World Implementation: Saint Alphonsus Medical Center



To reduce the noise level, Saint Alphonsus Medical Center [renovated a nursing unit using sound absorbing materials](#) like carpet, sound absorbing wall surfaces and acoustic tiles. Patients in the renovated unit reported improved quality of sleep, rating it as a 7 out of 10. Patients in the non-renovated unit reported a sleep quality of 4.9.

## Facilities Cleanliness

The cleanliness of your facility can not only impact patient health and infection control, but it also plays a part in the HCAHPS score. The AHA recommends the following:

- Using nonporous surfaces without joints or seams and nonporous upholstery for easy cleaning.
- Educating environmental services about proper cleaning methods for carpet
- Using chairs with “clean-out gaps”

InfectionControlToday suggests empowering housekeeping staff to talk to patients when cleaning in their rooms. Staff should:

- Greet the patient by name
- Introduce themselves
- Explain how long the task or tasks will take
- Explain what they are doing and why
- Ask the patient if they need anything before leaving

The cleanliness of patient rooms is likely high on your list, but don't overlook the appearance of common areas like entrances, lobbies, elevators and walkways.

A high ranking from publications like US News & World Report doesn't necessarily translate into high rankings from patients. Over 60 percent of Yelp reviews gave the top 20 hospitals in the country a review of one to three stars out of five, a study found. While these top facilities may excel clinically, patients were less than satisfied with issues like billing problems, wait times and lack of follow-up.

The study noted that most patients were pleased with the care they received but experienced customer service issues, which can make Yelp a valuable resource for discovering patient satisfaction.



While it might be tempting to look at [physician review sites to gauge patient satisfaction](#), these sites don't contain enough information to create meaningful insights, according to JAMA.



## 4: DON'T OVERLOOK THE SIMPLE THINGS

Lakeland Health System wanted to improve its patient satisfaction. The system tried nearly everything: tracking pain management, response to call lights, patient communication, even the quality of the food to no avail.

But it was one simple adjustment that made the difference: The medical staff changed how they spoke to patients. The CEO challenged [the staff to “bring their hearts to work”](#).

He reminded staff that for them, providing healthcare is likely routine, but for the patient it is one of the most emotionally challenging events in their lives.

The CEO told staff: “Every time you interact with a patient, tell them who you are, what you’re there to do, and then share a heartfelt ‘why’. For example, ‘I’m Tom, I’m here to change your dressings, ‘cause we want you home in time for your granddaughter’s wedding.’”



### THE RESULTS?

**The health system’s patient satisfaction score rose to the 95th percentile.**

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**As you’ve seen from the above examples, simple changes can be all that’s needed to raise your HCAHPS scores. Examining how staff communicates with each other and patients, stepping into the patient’s shoes and looking at how your facility appears to patients and examining your data can make all the difference.**