



Lowell Community Health Center Patient Experience Improvement

Nicholas Hajj, UMass Medical School Class of 2016

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Abstract

My summer project consisted of six weeks at the Lowell Community Health Center in Lowell, MA to help with their quality improvement efforts. Specific goals of the project were the development of tools to assess elements of patient experience, implementation of those tools, and general assistance with the health center’s patient service center. To achieve these goals, a “Patient Experience Tracer” and “Patient Satisfaction Survey” were developed and piloted; concurrently, I spent much time working at the front desk and gaining an appreciation of the center’s functions and patient population. The tracer, involving shadowing patients during their entire visit, was found to be an inefficient method and the focus was redirected to the survey. The pilot of the survey gathered 105 responses and showed overall positive ratings but identified waiting time for check-in and waiting time for the provider as areas needing improvement.

Background

The Lowell Community Health Center (LCHC), a non-profit 501(c)(3) health care agency located in the heart of downtown Lowell, aims to provide diverse and culturally competent care for the Greater Lowell area. Patients come from all walks of life and the LCHC reaches out to the uninsured, underinsured, non-English speakers, and other underserved groups. The health center offers many services to meet the needs of their patients; insurance counseling, HIV case management, behavioral health services, and youth outreach programs supplement their core of primary care. These services have grown since the beginning of the LCHC, resulting in the recent move to the larger space of a renovated historic mill building. In light of the move and the LCHC’s overarching mission to provide the best quality care to their very diverse patient base, this project aimed to help expand the patient-centered attitude of the health center by providing new tools for assessing aspects that contribute to how patients perceive their experience at the health center.

Methods

Initially, a patient-shadowing model was implemented to assess the patient experience. A “Patient Experience Tracer” was created, consisting of a checklist for the assessor to complete while following the patient from the beginning of their time at the health center all the way through the end. Upon finding that the tracer took approximately 90 minutes per patient and that participation was low (only 5 tracers were completed in three days), a survey model was decided upon instead. A new “Patient Satisfaction Survey” was created and had patients rate various areas on a scale from one to five, with five being “great” and one being “poor.” Patients were asked to complete the survey immediately before leaving the clinic, and a total of 105 patients were surveyed in four days.

Results

| LCHC Patient Satisfaction Survey Results: Number of Responses Per Satisfaction Level | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Great: 5 | Good: 4 | Okay: 3 | Fair: 2 | Poor: 1 | Average Score: (out of 5) | Satisfaction "Grade" (out of 100) |
| Waiting: | | | | | | | |
| How comfortable were the waiting areas? | 73 | 25 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 4.62 | 92.38 |
| How reasonable was the waiting time to get checked in? | 65 | 24 | 12 | 3 | 0 | 4.45 | 89.04 |
| How reasonable was the waiting time to see the provider? | 52 | 29 | 13 | 7 | 1 | 4.22 | 84.31 |
| Staff: | | | | | | | |
| Front Desk and Registration: | | | | | | | |
| How friendly were the receptionists? | 82 | 19 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 4.73 | 94.67 |
| How helpful were the receptionists? | 86 | 16 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4.79 | 95.81 |
| How well did the receptionists answer any questions? | 83 | 20 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4.79 | 95.77 |
| Nurses and Medical Assistants: | | | | | | | |
| How friendly was the nurse or medical assistant? | 85 | 14 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4.79 | 95.73 |
| How well did the nurse or medical assistant answer questions? | 89 | 13 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4.77 | 95.47 |
| How well did the nurse or medical assistant explain things to you? | 82 | 18 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4.73 | 94.62 |
| How comfortable did the nurse or medical assistant make you feel? | 83 | 15 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 4.74 | 94.81 |
| Provider: | | | | | | | |
| How well did the provider listen to you? | 80 | 15 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 4.74 | 94.80 |
| How satisfactory was the length of time the provider spent with you? | 66 | 29 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 4.58 | 91.68 |
| How well did the provider explain what you wanted to know? | 70 | 21 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 4.64 | 92.86 |
| How satisfied are you about the advice and treatment you received? | 71 | 22 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 4.64 | 92.73 |
| Other: | | | | | | | |
| How friendly and helpful were other staff you interacted with? | 70 | 23 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 4.60 | 92.00 |
| How satisfied were you with your interpreter, if used? | 39 | 13 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 4.61 | 92.14 |
| How friendly and helpful were the insurance counselors, if used? | 54 | 14 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 4.68 | 93.61 |
| Facility: | | | | | | | |
| How neat and clean was the building? | 90 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4.89 | 97.80 |
| How easy was it to find where to go? | 91 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4.91 | 98.20 |
| How comfortable and safe did you feel in the building? | 93 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4.92 | 98.40 |
| How private were clinical areas? | 81 | 14 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4.73 | 94.60 |
| Overall: | | | | | | | |
| How easily were you able to communicate with the staff? | 76 | 22 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4.73 | 94.60 |
| How well were your values, culture, and beliefs respected? | 82 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4.82 | 96.40 |
| How valued did you feel? | 79 | 20 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4.78 | 95.60 |
| How likely are you to recommend the clinic to friends and family? | 86 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4.86 | 97.20 |



Lowell Community Health Center Building

Discussion

While the patient tracers were found to be not as useful as hoped, the patient surveys were successful and revealed that the health center is satisfying patients very well overall, with 100% of the respondents indicating that they were either likely or very likely to recommend the clinic to friends and family. Areas that show some dissatisfaction are the waiting times for getting checked in and especially for seeing the provider, so further quality improvement efforts will be directed at identifying ways to speed up the process. Future efforts will also look more into connecting patient satisfaction information with demographics and translating the survey into other languages to better represent the views of patients who do not speak English. Overall, the survey pilot was a success and the clinic will continue to utilize the survey. The time spent working at the front desk also proved highly educational about the workings of a community health center.

