

## Appreciating the Care Team



### Executive Summary

Experience data has often been associated with bad news and admonitions to do better. But most patient comments are positive. Sharing compliments with members of the care team is a simple way to let them know the good news, a practice that can inspire them to bring their best selves to the workplace. What does it take to do this on a regular basis? This nSight highlights five key points:

1. Yearning to be validated and appreciated in a meaningful manner is a common theme in the results garnered through NRC Health's Workforce Engagement initiatives.
2. It's time to dispense with the notion that patient comments are negative: In our most recent sample of comments, just 11% were negative; 76% were positive, and 13% were neutral.
3. When we look at the subset of comments about members of the care team, the percentage of positive comments exceeds the overall positive marker, ranging from 83% to 93% positive.
4. NRC Health has launched two advanced capabilities to make sharing comments more reliable and vastly easier: enhanced Natural Language Processing / Text Analytics and Complement Sharing.
5. Health systems have engaged in creative ways to recognize members of the care team. Now it's easier to show appreciation for members of the care team at scale.



There is tremendous value in attending to experience on both sides of the stethoscope.



When it comes to experience, many healthcare organizations are taking a ‘fundamentals first’ approach to regain their footing after a very challenging few years. Our [2023 Experience Perspective](#) outlined a short list of the fundamentals – universal strategies to reframe attention on what matters most:

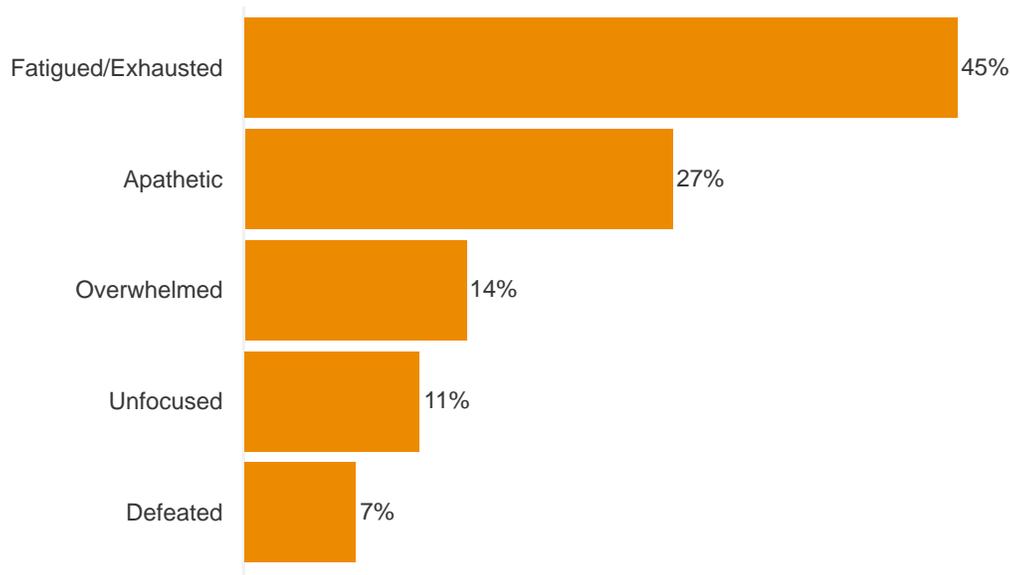
### Fundamentals

1. Alignment and buy-in
2. Human connection
3. Frontline focus

The process of capturing, summarizing, and sharing patient feedback is an essential part of this renewed focus because helping care providers reconnect to their personal ‘why’ and purpose is a powerful vector that runs through all three fundamentals. The intentional and innovative use of feedback is essential: Focusing only on scores gets in the way because it obscures the behaviors and outcomes that scores are meant to reflect.

## Changing the Frame: Bad News → Good News

Healthcare organizations rely on quantitative data – scores – to track performance toward goals and surface areas for improvement. While these are certainly effective use cases for patient feedback, overemphasizing the need to get better often leads to a feeling that scores are always negative, that experience data is always ‘bad news’. There’s little room for negativity right now, as care providers report record rates of burnout. We asked more than 750 people working and learning in healthcare to define burnout using their own terms. Here are the top five:



Feeling this way depletes the energy and diminishes the engagement that care-team members need to elevate the experience and delivery of care. Indeed, yearning to be validated and appreciated in a meaningful manner is a common theme in the results garnered through NRC Health’s Workforce Engagement surveys. For instance:

 *“I used to feel valued as an employee, but post-COVID I have not felt this way. I think burnout is a problem and I anticipate we will lose members of our workforce because of it.”*

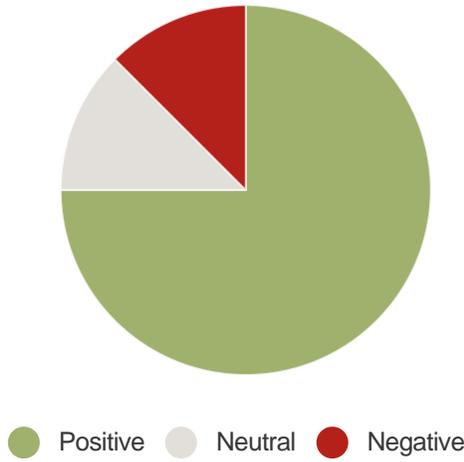
 *“Appreciation for employees should be well shown with genuine things, not just with food.”*

 *“We know what we’re worth and the type of work we do is outstanding. We’re just not appreciated at all. At my workplace it seems that it’s all about the numbers and meeting the next goal at whatever cost and the employees are the last thing to worry about.”*

Sharing qualitative data – patient comments – is a powerful way to remind care providers that their work is worthwhile and valued. The feedback that patients provide in their own words adds depth and dimension to how they view the experience, and it often conveys how they perceive members of the care team.

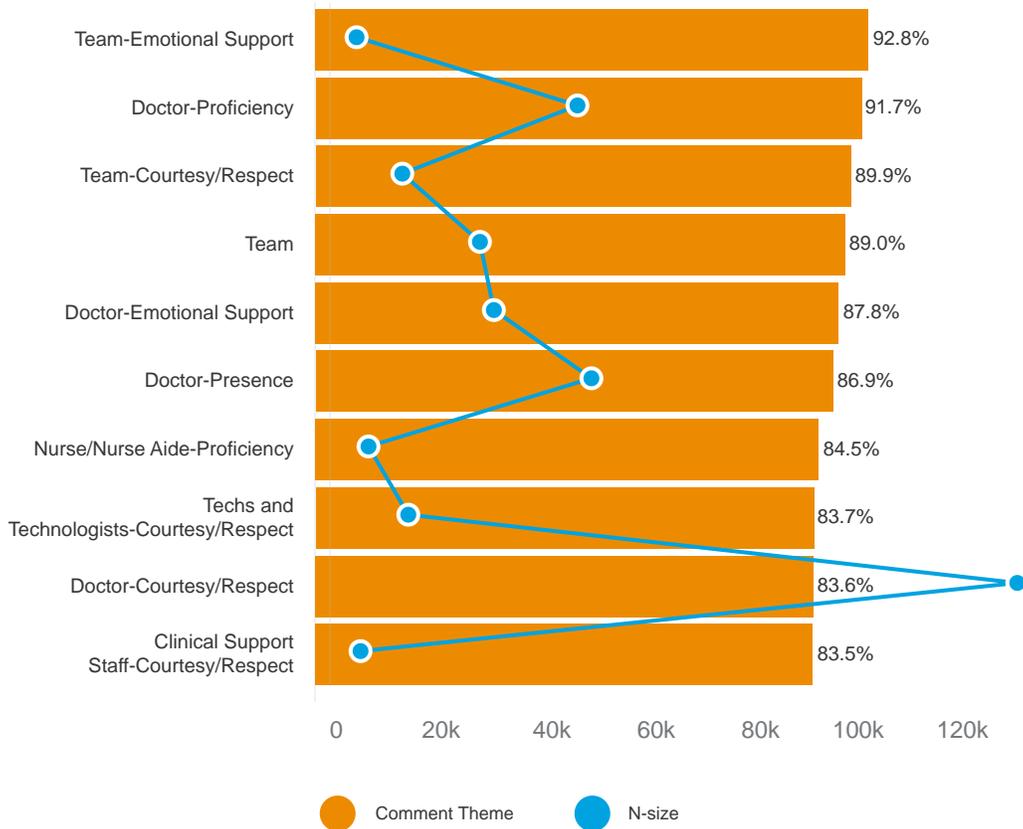
There’s a common myth that patient comments are mostly negative or that only patients with negative experiences complete surveys and leave comments. This is not true. As a matter of fact, just 11% of all patient comments are negative, while 76% are positive, and 13% are neutral. And when we look at comments about members of the care team, the percentage of positive comments exceeds the overall positive marker.

### Comment Valence: Overall



Since launch of NRC's new NLP model on 3/15/2023

### Top 10 Themes about Members of the Care Team



Since launch of NRC's new NLP model on 3/15/2023

Furthermore, the most common type of comment left by patients is 'recognition.' More than one in four patients go out of their way to leave praise for members of their care team – the very people who may be struggling or feeling like their contributions go unnoticed. Imagine how good it feels to see comments like this:

 *"From the time I walked into the door until I left out the door the entire staff was genuinely concerned. Paramedic H is the most awesome person I have ever met. She showed me how much she cared and she gave me such a positive energy that I would never forget. The entire doctor and nurse staff was amazing. The ultrasound tech was amazing. I wouldn't go anywhere but to this hospital."* (ED)

 *"I am 100% satisfied with my visit. From reception to my doctor and her assistant to the lab test I was treated very well. I am very happy to share this with you. You have great people in your hospital staff at all levels."* (Medical Practice)

 *"Dr. J is a very caring doctor and I feel that he cares about his patients. I never feel hurried. He asks if there is anything I want to discuss. If he suggests changes or new options for my health care, he always asks my opinion and then takes the time for explanations. He's great and personable. Easy to talk to."* (Medical Practice)

 *"Dr D is one of the most knowledgeable and caring doctors I have ever had work with me. She is courteous and kind and ensures that I feel comfortable and safe during my visit even when discussing very difficult things."* (Medical Practice)

 *"The entire experience during this visit was beyond what I could've expected. The nurse who took my blood was wonderful and attentive. Doctor was also interested in what I had to say about my diagnosis and very attentive as well. He cared about how I felt and wanted to ensure I understood the treatment. I couldn't have asked for a better experience!"* (Urgent Care)

 *"It was very easy to talk to the nurses, and doctors, very professional. made me feel very relaxed. feel good about coming for my needed surgery."* (Outpatient Testing)

 *"We had a great experience delivering our second child! The nurses in triage were so fast and helpful in getting me upstairs quickly. Our L&D nurse was extremely patient during my labor and helped me change positions a million times. She also explained everything to me and my husband thoroughly even though she knew I was a doctor, which I greatly appreciated! My epidural was perfect. Our midwife was calm and presented options to us for delivery. My husband and I are so grateful for our second amazing delivery experience. Thank you to the whole team that took care of us!"* (inpatient)

 *"The staff was very attentive and all my requests were answered immediately. This was the best hospital stay I've had out of the many times I have been in."* (Inpatient)

 *"Exceptional, outstanding, professional - these are words that do not even begin to describe the kind of staff, people that were coming into my room. The lunch ladies were outstanding. You have a wonderful hospital. I hope that all the other hospitals take example. It was really a joy for me to be there under the circumstances. I was so scared, but everybody made me feel safe and everybody was outstanding."* (Inpatient)

The key to getting comments like these to care providers is making it easy to share them in a meaningful, specific, and timely way.

## Improving the View: Enhanced NLP and Text Analytics

In March 2023, NRC Health launched a major evolution in our Natural Language Processing (NLP) and text-analytic capabilities. We replaced our legacy entity/action schema with new theme/sub-theme pairings powered by a state-of-the-art deep neural network trained on hundreds of thousands of patient comments. This model offers more relevant comment tags, more accurate sentiments, and has increased flexibility in terms of the scope of comments it can comprehend.

Historically, one of the primary uses of NRC's NLP model has been to create and deliver alerts when our algorithms encounter problematic comments related to deeply negative patient experiences. While we will continue this important work, we are now able to reliably automate delivery of the praise and recognition that is so vital to keeping care teams energized and engaged.

## Making it Easy: Manual to Highly Automated

NRC Health's new **Compliment Sharing** feature makes the process of recognizing care teams easy by turning what has long been a manual process – think Excel spreadsheets and scissors – into a streamlined process to recognize people on the frontline of care. Here's how it works:



Natural Language Processing (NLP) automatically pulls positive comments and matches them with patient encounters.



Comments are displayed in an intuitive "send to" interface where users can quickly and easily share positive feedback with only a few clicks.



Users can select and send multiple comments in a single, customizable email to ensure care team members receive personalized recognition.



# NRC Health's customers are having fun with recognition!

Many NRC Health customers understand the power of recognition and have been using patient comments to recognize care providers in creative and fun ways. The results are palpable – care providers beam with pride, shed a tear on occasion, and sometimes even enjoy a fancy dessert. Two great examples:

## **McLeod Moments of Excellence | McLeod Health | South Carolina**

Like many organizations, McLeod Health starts their weekly Quality and Safety Meeting by reading patient comments from NRC Health's Experience and Care Transitions surveys. These comments often reference a care professional by name or a care team and share what was done to exemplify the organization's values – Caring, Person, Quality, and Integrity.

Reading positive comments sets the tone for the meeting and lets leaders celebrate the great deeds that occur across the organization. One thing was missing: The professionals or teams being acknowledged were not always in the meeting. If their leader was not in the meeting or didn't share the recognition, the professionals may never know how much they are appreciated.

Nick DeStefano, Service Excellence Process Manager, and the Service Excellence team addressed this concern by creating an 8 ½" x 11" poster that includes each acknowledged care professional's name and the positive comment they've received. While comments are still read aloud during the Quality and Safety Meeting, leaders now sign the poster or write personal notes on it as well. After the meeting, the Service Excellence team presents the signed posters to the care professionals. If an acknowledged professional is not working that day, their leader holds onto the poster until they return to work.

All posters are hung in a public place for everyone to see – even patients. The next week, the posters are removed, and given to the professionals, and the process starts over again. Nick shared an instance of giving a poster to a nurse: "The nurse was in tears. 'I remember this patient', the nurse said. 'This means so much.' It's really cool to see that reaction. Professionals feel truly recognized and seen. They know what they are doing is making a difference."

## **"Earn a Bundt" | Maine Medical Center | Maine**

Leaders from Maine Medical Center know firsthand the impact of employee recognition, and wanted to develop a program that made employees feel special. The organization's Chief Operating Officer, Jennifer McCarthy, suggested giving a fancy dessert to employees who were mentioned positively in patient comments. "I had seen a similar program at another health system earlier in my career, and I was struck by how well care team members had responded to it." The reason: It's about more than dessert.

Maine Medical Center's Patient Experience Department mines survey responses to find glowing comments and uses EPIC to find missing details, such as care providers' last names or care settings. Recognized care providers receive an ornately wrapped "bundlet" from Nothing Bundt Cakes. "It's not just a cupcake," Melissa Retter, Maine Medical Center's Patient Experience Director, says. "The presentation is beautiful. The cake comes in a pretty plastic container, covered in cellophane and tied with a ribbon. It's really elegant."

And that's not all. Inside the package, the care provider will also find a thank you note and printout of the compliment. "We deliver the cakes to the units and departments. If the team has time, we celebrate with the recipient and their team. We also acknowledge those who received a cake through a monthly e-newsletter on the intranet," Melissa shares.

Melissa recalls a time when a care provider in Radiology had a difficult encounter with a patient he knew very well. The patient was upset because the procedure had been rescheduled multiple times. The care provider knew it was going to be hard to regain the patient's trust. "I'm going to earn a Bundt!" the care provider decided. Meaning, I got this! I'm going to take it from just recovering the situation to knocking it out of the park. Sure enough, the care provider earned a Bundt cake. "He was so proud of getting that cake," Melissa said.

---

## Bottom Line

In the context of Human Understanding, it's clear that authentic recognition can be fuel for the soul of people caring for patients. There are many avenues to recognizing care providers. Events, awards, and treats go a long way, but only go so far. Human connection goes farther. And deeper. NRC Health now makes it easy to deliver meaningful and timely praise directly to people on the frontline, demonstrating how experience data can serve as good news - and with great impact at scale.

