

# A "Patients First" Mentality Sets the Tone at PIH Health



A PICKER INSTITUTE SERIES

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## Patient-Centered Care Case Study

April 2017



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### Organization Profiled

PIH Health, Whittier, California

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### Statement of Interest

Hospitals today strive to meet patient needs on many levels. The Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey documents hospital performance in eight areas of patient-centered care: nurse communication, physician communication, discharge information, pain management, communication about medications, cleanliness, quietness at night, and responsiveness of hospital staff. The survey also asks how patients rate the hospital overall, and whether they would recommend the hospital to family and friends.

In each of these areas certain hospitals are excellent industry leading performers, with consistent high scores on specific HCAHPS measures. Picker Institute case studies explore the ways hospitals achieve these outstanding results, and share examples of best practices.

This case study profiles PIH Health Hospital Whittier, which the Picker Institute has identified as a high performer in delivering patient-centered care based on its exemplary performance in HCAHPS publicly reported data for the hospital "Overall Rating" for services provided.

### Organization Profile

PIH Health is a non-profit, regional healthcare network with two hospitals, numerous outpatient medical offices, a multispecialty medical (physician) group, home healthcare services and hospice care, as well as heart, cancer, and emergency services. From its extensive facilities in Whittier and Downey, California, PIH Health serves more than two million residents in Los Angeles and Orange Counties and throughout the San Gabriel Valley.

#### HCAHPS QUESTION: OVERALL RATE

Using any number from 0 to 10, where 0 is the worst hospital possible and 10 is the best hospital possible, what number would you use to rate this hospital during your stay?

## A “Patients First” Mentality

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PIH Health has a strong culture that embraces a “Patients First” mentality, meaning that all patients are everyone’s patient. Staff at PIH Health are committed to this vision. It is taught from the beginning of employment starting with orientation and comes to life as they see it put into practice in their daily work life.

This atmosphere is felt the moment a patient begins their journey—from the valet driver to the receptionist to the nurse to the doctor. Everyone is there working toward the same goal. “The most important stake in the game if you’re a patient, is your stake in the game,” said Ricki Stajer, RN, M.A., CPHQ, Vice President, Care Coordination. “The patient experience is such an important part of us.”

In order to achieve consistent and positive experiences for patients, visitors, and each other, staff is expected to always demonstrate respectable behavior. PIH Health developed a list of behavioral standards for employees to follow that include:

- Show consideration.
- Provide assistance and follow up.
- Inspire confidence in a professional manner.
- Always demonstrate and show we are a team.

This holds staff accountable to their behavior and is a reminder of small gestures that encourage a positive experience at the hospital. For example, staff are encouraged to make eye contact and acknowledge patients and visitors, ask patients how they would like to be addressed, follow through with what they say they will do, and volunteer to assist patients and visitors in solving problems. Everyone helps each other out and there is nobody saying “this isn’t my job” or “this isn’t my patient.”

Promptly responding to call lights is included in these behavioral standards and a main focus at PIH Health. Employees go through a training called “Heads Up” where they learn about the importance of quickly attending to call lights. All departments that received this training are expected to answer the call lights, even if they are not a nurse or a doctor. If staff walk by a room with a call light on, they will go into the room and ask what assistance the patient needs. They then either assist the patient or call for someone who is able to help with their request.

PIH Health takes this a step further. They review call light response times every four hours. If the target time of five minutes is not being met, they adjust the staffing. These numbers are posted in the staff lounge so it is visual and everyone is on top of it. This is part of how they manage their patient workload. They also look at the big picture understanding that some patients need more attention or there

will be family concerns so this can factor into the response time and staffing will need to be rebalanced to ensure they can meet their targets and keep patients satisfied.

The “Patients First” mentality is reinforced constantly through communication to the staff and patient stories that are shared across the organization and used to drive change. “Patients First describes who we are and who we always want to be,” said Debra Legan, Vice President, Marketing, Business Development, and Community Benefit.

There is a Patients First Council that meets monthly and consists of members of the leadership team from varied patient care, ancillary, and service departments throughout the hospital. The committee is responsible for ensuring the Patients First vision aligns with the organization’s tenants of relationship-based care and the high-reliability path to zero harm. It also makes sure that processes and systems are designed specifically for patient and family needs. The council’s work includes identifying opportunities for improvement, implementing performance excellence and safety programs, providing a forum to engage and partner with patients and family members, and working with physicians in quality and safety improvement efforts. All improvements are designed to meet the needs of the patients first. Often, patients are involved in councils to ensure their perspective is included in the end product.

## Leadership Drives the Culture

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When asked why the overall rating score is so high, it was frequently repeated that it is because of leadership. The leadership team live and breathe the values of the organization and it is prevalent that the patient is the top priority.

Leadership drives changes throughout the organization that will benefit the patient. For example, they felt strongly that it was important for the roles of staff to be clear to patients and families. To make this more apparent, they had each department choose a color for their uniforms (for example, CNAs wear maroon, nurses wear blue, and other clinicians wear discipline specific colors or white lab coats). Employees also wear name tags with their first and last name so it is transparent who they are and what their role is at PIH Health.

When patients complained about the hospital being too loud, leadership started a project that is now embedded into the daily routine. Two times a day, between 2–4 p.m. and at 10 p.m. there is a quiet period where they reduce noise and dim the lights. PIH Health also made improvements such as quieter machines and no overhead pages. Staff often take time to think about small changes that will have an impact on patients. For example, volunteers play piano in the lobby and the shutters are left open in the room so patients being admitted see the view. Last year

at a leadership retreat, they took time to come up with ideas that would be of value to patients. Something as simple as putting in more outlets for charging devices makes a big difference for patients and families.

Leadership is very active and available anytime to answer staff questions or find solutions to problems. They are on the floor seeing patients every day and working with those on the frontlines to make decisions. They are approachable and involved in the day-to-day operations of the organization, and it shows that they truly care about their employees. "I value each of my employees," said Reanna Thompson, RN, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Nursing Officer. "The frontline is the most important job because it is so close to the patients. I'm lucky to be able to lead the people who take care of the patients."

It doesn't go unnoticed that Thompson loves her staff. "She is the perfect package of what you want a leader to be: caring, knowledgeable, and supportive," said Debbie McKnight, Administrative Director. "She sets clear expectations and works with staff in a collaborative method rather than just telling them what to do." Her high level of communication and commitment to protect the culture has made her a role model for the staff. "Culture is the most precious thing we have, and she will protect it with all of her efforts," Stajer added.

The whole leadership team has created a culture where there is no feeling of hierarchy. The CEO regularly sits down with staff and has lunch with them in the cafeteria, and Thompson asks her staff to speak up if they have concerns or ideas for improvement. "I count on them telling me if I can do something better. I don't want 'yes' people," Thompson said. Leaders are confident in their staffs' skills and decision making and empower them to take action. It is clear that there is a mutual respect among leadership and staff that shines through in how they treat their patients.

Leadership model and reinforce "Patient First" behaviors and create a space for priorities to occur. For example, they regularly come together for a MAC (Management Advisory Council) meeting. Leadership across the organization attend this meetings from various departments including everything from pharmacy to finance to nursing to human resources. This meeting provides a space to learn together, share successes, and hear about new projects or services.

These meetings are a good opportunity to introduce positive leadership habits that help maintain the patient-centered culture. For example, leadership wanted to make sure staff felt appreciated and recognized for the work they do so they incorporated staff thank-you notes into the MAC meeting. Those attending were provided with a template and tips for writing meaningful thank-you notes to their employees. They were encouraged to make these notes feel personalized and to pick a

delivery method that the employee would appreciate most (e.g., if they don't like recognition in public, leave it on a chair for them to read privately).

It was very important to leadership that the staff embrace this idea of thanking people. Making time for this ensures it gets done and sets a tone of gratitude across the entire organization. "Staff wanted more thank-you recognition. Instead of leadership just creating an action plan, they created the time and the space for this to happen," said Kacee Cabanting, Director of Organizational Development and Education. "Now they bring the stationary and the first five minutes of every meeting, we write these notes."

During this meeting they also set time aside to do rounds. Everyone in the meeting pairs up and goes to an assigned part of the hospital to talk with patients about their experience. Each rounding session has a focus and leadership provides them with a standard set of questions. For instance, when the focus is on communication and responsiveness this template includes questions such as: Is the staff answering your questions? Is the staff attentive to your needs? Having standardized tools makes all staff feel comfortable talking with the patients and ensures that everyone is asking the same questions. Patients are asked for recommendations for improvement as well. They then speak with the staff on that floor to make sure they have everything they need to successfully do their job. Immediately after, they go back to the meeting and talk with the group about anything interesting or alarming that they heard.

**"I value each of my employees. The frontline is the most important job because it is so close to the patients. I'm lucky to be able to lead the people who take care of the patients."**

**—Reanna Thompson, RN, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Nursing Officer**

## **Working Together**

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Leadership stresses the importance of teamwork. Thompson empowers nurses to speak and partner with doctors for the betterment of the patients. To successfully do their job they need to have clear communication, respect each other, immediately address issues that come up, and feel comfortable asking questions and working together.

To enhance this partnership, they started doing daily trio rounds with the nurse, doctor, and patient. This helps improve communication, ensure that messaging is consistent, and shows the patient that there is a high level of nurse and physician collaboration. This has helped them make improvements

throughout the organization as well. For example, during trio rounding they found that time from ED to seeing a doctor was far too long so they were able to put in place a plan for decreasing that wait time.

Performance and communication is also enhanced through dyad teams. The dyads consist of doctors and hospital leaders. They work together on projects and benefit through all of the skills they bring to the table collectively. Through these teams they have done projects where they measured different areas of the hospital such as quality and safety, patient satisfaction, financial performance, and teamwork and look for opportunities for improvement. They then created a realistic 12-month plan to achieve their goals. "Having great nurses, great staff, and a great medical staff working together has helped us continue to enhance the patient experience," said Rosalio Lopez, M.D., Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer. "We want this to be a place where we take our family members to get the best care."

Just as the COO/CNO models behavior for the hospital staff, medical directors feel it is their duty to be role models for physicians. They define expectations and are available to mentor and provide support. While mentoring, medical directors can also make sure that these possible future leaders are committed and interested, well respected, and willing to learn—key attributes for a successful leader. Lopez also checks in to monitor these relationships for success and make sure the mentee is getting everything they need.

Mentoring is happening on a large scale at PIH Health. Many high-performing leaders, such as Thompson and the CEO, mentor others within the organization. They also go out of their way to help each other understand every aspect of the organization. For example, finance have partnered with nurse leaders to create daily tools to manage their budgets.

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**—Rosalio Lopez, M.D., Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer**

## Investing in Staff

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As leadership works hard to maintain the culture, investing in their workforce is always a focus. This has led to a culture where employees often stay for a long time, sometimes their whole career. PIH Health has a great reputation and there is community

and staff pride in the organization. "This is the place to work if you live around here. Everyone is proud to work here and you don't sense that at every hospital," said Legan. "Although the hospital has grown, it still feels like a small community hospital where neighbors are taking care of neighbors."

One of the staff members mentioned that he lives 20 minutes away, but if he goes to the grocery store wearing a PIH Health shirt, people always come up to him saying how much they love the hospital. This type of positive brand recognition makes people feel honored to work there.

"It's well-known that you'll have a good experience here, so people want to work at PIH Health. They are not going to dishonor the name," said Veronica Sanchez, Reception Supervisor. "The staff is like family, and I felt that right away when I started working here eight years ago. I could speak up and be heard and everyone takes part in everyone's success."

When employees don't adopt the culture they typically stand out compared to their peers. PIH Health does behavioral interviewing when looking for new employees to ensure they will fit with the culture. The organization hires a lot of new graduates, especially nurses who have already done rotations there. This is a good opportunity to instill the culture and values of the organization in them right from the beginning. From the get-go they talk to them about the culture of the unit they are on and expectations with call lights, as well as who to go to for any concerns. The organization also likes to promote from within whenever possible.

As part of the focus of developing leaders, PIH Health discovered the job descriptions for clinical directors, assistant clinical directors, and charge nurses needed to be rewritten to make them better fit the culture and needs of the patients. To do this, they added the customer service values of the organization and built in behavioral standards for each of the values that must be demonstrated consistently for the revised roles. Rather than just keeping the staff as is, everyone reapplied for their position and was evaluated against the ability to perform up to the level of the behavioral standards. This was important to making sure the right people were in those positions. What was most important to the leadership was that staff understood the reasoning behind it. The staff and middle-management evaluations were also revised to reflect elements of Magnet to make it more meaningful. Leadership was very transparent and careful with the messaging to clearly explain why they were making these changes and let staff know they didn't want to lose anyone with the transition.

There are several opportunities for education throughout the organization and participating in education sessions is a requirement for performance reviews. There are quarterly competency and skills trainings. In addition to regular orientation programs, the hospital

sets leaders up for success with a comprehensive new leader track and orientation. Additionally, PIH has developed leadership competencies that they have incorporated into unique success profiles for nursing leadership roles.

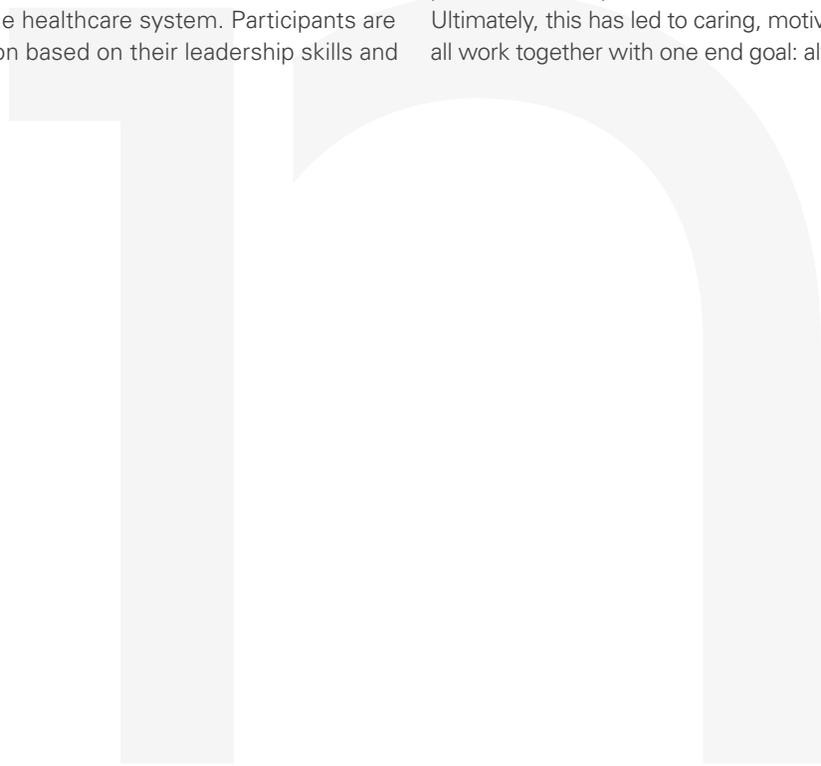
Many nurses at PIH Health Hospital Whittier go through the NICHE (Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders) program. This is a 20-plus module program for nurses that is designed to address the complex needs of older adults. This has helped PIH Health Hospital Whittier become a NICHE designated hospital, placing them at the forefront of geriatric care.

PIH Health also partners with schools and offers tuition reimbursement. For example, the Whittier Healthcare Leadership certificate program is open to PIH Health employees. The goal of this program is to develop leaders who will be instrumental in transforming and evolving the healthcare system. Participants are nominated by the organization based on their leadership skills and

potential for growth. Students are then enrolled in a 13-month program where they attend cohort model classes taught by Whittier professors on campus.

Leadership throughout the organization are extremely supportive of educational opportunities. The CEO wants employees to have a good work/life balance so he encouraged the classes to be during work hours and to have students get paid for the time. He didn't want this to be something they had to do in addition to work. Those nominated for the program were also reassured that HR would work with their departments to figure out how to make this a successful transition.

At PIH Health the patient-centered culture sets the tone for the organization. The values drive decisions, behaviors and performance, improvement initiatives, and care philosophies. Ultimately, this has led to caring, motivated staff and leadership that all work together with one end goal: always put the patient first.



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