

Leveraging Patient Experience Feedback as an Effective Approach to Alleviating Provider Burnout

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Nobody ever said being a doctor was easy, but no one ever said it would be this hard.

The demands placed on healthcare providers have reached unprecedented levels. Doctors are now expected to see more patients, deliver perfect quality care, and be constantly available through digital platforms. Patients, too, have increasingly high expectations for personalized experiences that demonstrate an understanding of their unique health circumstances and goals. NRC Health surveys show that 68 percent of patients expect providers to understand how health affects their life, and 71 percent of patients expect providers to understand their health goals.¹

Unfortunately, this heightened pressure has resulted in a significant rise in provider burnout, stress, and overall well-being issues. A study by the American Medical Association revealed that an alarming 63 percent of physicians reported symptoms of burnout in 2021, a substantial increase from 38 percent in 2020.²

It is no secret that many physicians don't love getting graded on their interactions with patients. In fact, many providers list patient experience scores as a contributing factor to their burnout.³ Of course, simply dismissing patient feedback is not the solution, as it plays a crucial role in human-centered care. Instead, there is an opportunity for hospitals and health systems to improve the utilization of patient experience feedback data. When utilized effectively, patient feedback can serve as a powerful tool in combating burnout. This article proposes three shifts in the traditional approach to using patient experience feedback that will help enhance the patient experience and positively impact providers. These changes can transform patient experience from

1 NRC Health, National study of 48,688 consumers, March 2022.

2 American Medical Association, 2021 National Physician Burnout Study.

3 Schneider, et al., "The Effect of Patient Satisfaction Scores on Physician Job Satisfaction and Burnout," *Future Science OA*, November 12, 2020.

a “bad news” discipline that contributes to stress and burnout, into a “good news” discipline creating motivation and fulfillment for healthcare professionals.

Recommendation 1: Leverage Patient Feedback for Recognition and Appreciation

Contrary to certain stereotypes, the vast majority of physicians are compassionate individuals who have chosen their profession to serve and care for others. They deeply care about the experiences they facilitate for their patients. Sharing positive patient feedback can have a profound impact on provider morale and motivation, reinforcing their sense of purpose and reminding them of their initial calling to medicine. According to NRC Health research, 76 percent of patient experience feedback is positive, and the most common comment received in a survey is one that recognizes a care team member. Sharing these positive sentiments through personalized notes can go a long way in demonstrating appreciation for their care. Lean on your patient experience vendor’s technology to help automatically identify and share comments that are compliments.

Traditional Patient Experience Approach	Recommended Approach
Improvement-oriented: Identifies comments that show dissatisfaction. Focuses on changing behaviors.	Recognition-oriented: Identifies comments that show appreciation and gratitude. Focuses on instilling behaviors the provider is already great at.
Result: Providers may feel discouraged, resentful, and like they are personally not good enough.	Result: Providers are reminded that their work is meaningful and appreciated. They are motivated to repeat behaviors that are praised.

Recommendation 2: Shift Focus Away from Grades and Metrics

Another important step is shifting the focus away from grades and metrics in patient experience programs. The traditional approach of emphasizing benchmarks and scores can make providers feel as though they are being graded. Instead, the emphasis should be on empowering providers through constructive feedback. By adopting a more personalized and supportive approach, providers can be guided towards areas of improvement without fixating on numerical rankings. This approach fosters a culture of continuous improvement and prioritizes a comprehensive, patient-centered approach to enhancing the overall patient experience.

Traditional Patient Experience Approach	Recommended Approach
<p>Dr. Garcia, you are in the 67th percentile for the “provider listened carefully metric.” Here are some best practices to make sure you are reaching your goal of 90th percentile.</p>	<p>Dr. Garcia, in general patients love the care they get from you. Based on your most recent patient feedback, the one area it would be great to focus on is making sure it is clear to patients that you are listening to them. Here are some tips from other doctors I’ve seen that work well. What else can I do to support you?</p>
<p>Result: Patient feedback is dehumanized. Emphasis is on scores, not what the scores are meant to reflect.</p>	<p>Result: Providers can concentrate on specific, actionable behavior enhancements and feel supported by leadership.</p>

Recommendation 3: Use Patient Feedback to Build Human Connections

Finally, in line with the principles of human-centered care and de-emphasizing scores, it is recommended to gather patient feedback that goes beyond immediate post-encounter assessments. Traditional patient experience surveys focus on how the healthcare encounter was perceived, but it is equally vital to focus on building human connections. By asking questions that address patients’ pressing concerns, pressures, goals, and risks, patient experience teams can arm providers with valuable insights into what truly matters to the their patients. This not only strengthens the patient–provider relationship but also aligns patient experience as the conduit connecting providers with the core purpose that drew them to medicine in the first place.

Traditional Patient Experience Approach	Recommended Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How likely would you be to recommend us? • Did our staff explain things in a way you could understand? • How easy did we make it for you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you like a nurse to contact you regarding any concerns? • Do you have any questions about your medications? • When it comes to treatment for health problems, I prefer... • In terms of everyday life, this is my biggest pressure or worry...
<p>Result: Reinforces the notion that healthcare is transactional rather than relationship-oriented.</p>	<p>Result: Facilitates greater understanding, engagement, and partnership between patients and care providers.</p>

→ Key Board Takeaways

With provider burnout and stress levels reaching all-time highs, healthcare boards should ensure that their organizations have the right methods in place for effectively utilizing patient experience data to empower physicians and improve career fulfillment:

- Ask management how patient experience feedback is utilized to improve provider performance at your organization.
- Consider what actions leadership can take to better support and motivate physicians, boost morale, and ensure providers feel appreciated.
- Invite physicians to the table to offer ideas and feedback on patient experience strategies and goals.
- Set a culture at the top that prioritizes physician well-being and encourages positive reinforcement.

These recommendations center around the transformative concept of reframing patient experience as a “good news” discipline, which has the potential to yield remarkable positive outcomes within healthcare settings. By openly acknowledging the detrimental effects of the conventional “bad news” approach, we can catalyze a shift towards a more constructive and empowering mindset. By highlighting the numerous advantages of adopting a positive outlook, healthcare organizations can cultivate an environment that not only enhances the patient’s experience but also uplifts the quality of life for providers. This comprehensive approach benefits patients by ensuring their needs are met, while simultaneously actively engaging providers in the process, resulting in a more gratifying and meaningful healthcare experience for all individuals involved in the delivery of care.

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