

RWJ Hamilton Turns to Allegiance to Improve Its Satisfaction Scores and Reduce Employee Turnover

When it comes to patient and employee engagement, there may not be another environment equal to that of a hospital. Our customers are people who are sick or injured. They come to us in pain, worried, stressed and in need of care and compassion. To be effective, hospitals have to have engaged employees. Filling the patient service role with just any warm body simply will not work.

At Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton (RWJ Hamilton), our business is caring for people. We have frequently been recognized by the healthcare industry with the highest honors in quality and patient satisfaction because of our caregivers' desire to go the extra mile, take an additional rounding trip and listen to patients' needs. We believe that engaged employees make for happier patients, and ultimately, higher patient satisfaction scores. It is these scores that directly influence our consistent industry recognition and impact our revenues.

This is why we take employee engagement so seriously. We know that our reputation and revenues are based on our patients' experiences. We have outstanding patient satisfaction scores that are directly related to our best practices and our commitment to treating engagement as a business asset. Here are some of our best practices.

Employee engagement is linked to a number of factors, from communication and leadership to recognition and opportunities for advancement. Critical to their level of engagement is providing an environment that supports learning opportunities. Our leaders set the tone for engagement, support our initiatives to enhance it and provide us with the tools to measure it. When all of these drivers exist, employees feel they have a voice within the organization, are more engaged and less likely to search for another opportunity. In fact, RWJ Hamilton has much lower vacancy and turnover rates compared to other organizations.

Our recent employee satisfaction survey revealed that more than 80 percent of employees understand our mission and nearly 80 percent feel their coworkers are cooperating as a team to accomplish that mission. This high level of engagement influences how we treat our patients. And as we treat our patients better, our satisfaction scores improve, allowing us to draw a direct correlation between employee engagement and patient satisfaction.

ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON
UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL
HAMILTON



*By Monica Olaff,
Patient Relations Manager,
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Technology provides our employees with a vehicle to voice their opinions, concerns and suggestions. Based upon our employee engagement survey results, we created four engagement groups led by directors. These engagement groups included recognition and advancement, communication, supervision/leadership, and environment and equipment. Each group has their own goals and their own section of the hospital's Intranet where they can communicate updates, activities and opportunities.

RWJ Hamilton has a variety of methods to reward and recognize employees. Our customer service cash program rewards employees with RWJ Dollars which can be used in the cafeteria, gift shop or to purchase gift cards. Our senior leaders take advantage of our Managing Up program with hand-written notes that personally recognize employees for acts of kindness and extraordinary service.

Leadership's engagement trickles down into all of our measurements, and although it's everyone's responsibility to help others become engaged, senior management leads the effort. We know that because of our commitment to employee engagement, we are seeing an improvement in our patient satisfaction scores. Each week we look at the scores, identify areas where we can improve, and identify the people and departments that deserve to be recognized. Keeping engagement levels high allows us to build employee morale and create a positive culture.

Since implementing advanced engagement technology more than four years ago, we have continued to enjoy increasing patient satisfaction scores. Our excellent service has been recognized through numerous awards, including the Press Ganey Summit Award presented to the hospital's Cancer Institute. We are also a four-year repeat winner of the Consumer Choice Award, which recognizes hospitals that have the best overall quality and image as determined by a study of more than 140,000 healthcare consumers.

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Recently, we were accredited by the State of New Jersey and the Joint Commission for Stroke compliance. And, in 2004, we received the highest honor for performance excellence, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, presented annually to high performing organizations by the President of the United States.

We rely on seeing a real-time picture of what is happening with our employees and our patients. Identifying, tracking and trending concerns with this leading-edge technology puts this data at our fingertips to make lasting changes. By implementing our engagement solutions, we made it clear to our caregivers that they are our most important asset; and to our customers that patient care is our number one priority.

With the growing number of choices in healthcare, employers need to focus on engagement to achieve a competitive edge. Employees want employers who listen and give them the opportunity to grow professionally and contribute to the organization's success. Consumers want healthcare providers that offer a haven to heal with caregivers that deliver personal and compassionate service. Our consistent and high patient satisfaction scores tell the story – engaged employees lead to loyal patients.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monica Olaff, Patient Relations Manager, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Hamilton (RWJ Hamilton), has been employed with RWJ Hamilton for over 7 years and has been in her current role as Patient Relations Manager for 5 years. She is involved in driving the Patient Satisfaction Scores through process improvement teams and working with patient focus groups on opportunities for improvement. As the Patient Advocate she addresses patient care concerns as well as other concerns related to the patient experience. She also works closely with department managers to ensure a positive patient experience.

Her background is in human resources and healthcare. She earned her degree from Monmouth University in Speech, Theatre and Communications.

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