Experience is everything

“Improving the patient experience is the number one thing we should be doing in our organization. It’s the right thing to do. We will unleash the hearts and minds of all the members of Hartford HealthCare. We are declaring that this will be our highest level of commitment and how we differentiate this health system. We are all in.” —Jeffrey Flaks, HHC Chief Operating Officer

Inside our operating rooms, examining rooms, emergency rooms and patient rooms, Hartford HealthCare delivers top-notch clinical care every day. But when some patients leave our hospitals, they say they are not completely satisfied. The food may have been cold. The hall seemed noisy. The nurse appeared aloof. The floor was dirty. The operation may have been flawless and the antibiotics cured the infection. But all they remember is that somebody, at one critical moment, was not nice.

Our patient satisfaction scores “need improvement,” HHC Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Jeffrey Flaks told more than 220 attendees at HHC’s 4th Annual Patient Experience Showcase in Hartford on April 8. He said improving the patient experience must be our system’s top priority.

HHC, he said, is building a team dedicated to ensuring that patients feel well cared for, in addition to getting great care.

Leading the effort is interim Chief Experience Officer Stacie Pallotta, a consultant with Press Ganey who in the past served as senior director of the Office of Patient Experience at the Cleveland Clinic.

Over the past six months, Pallotta has spent countless hours visiting Hartford HealthCare’s five acute care hospitals and conducting focus groups with

“Every one of us makes a difference”
Lessons from the Patient Perspective

It’s often said that doctors make the worst patients. But does becoming a patient make someone a better doctor? For Dr. Dan Kombert, Central Region Director of the Hospitalist Program, that answer is without a doubt, “Yes.”

At this year’s 4th Annual Patient Experience Showcase Dr. Kombert and his RN-wife, Joanne, shared a powerful story about what it was like to be on the other side of the care team — and ultimately how every seemingly small detail of their experience gave them a new perspective on what matters at the bedside.

Eight years ago, Dr. Kombert sought care from a Boston hospital to get to the bottom of frequent gastrointestinal bleeding. On the day of a routine endoscopy, Joanne anxiously waited for his status. Hours later, she learned

See Experience, page 2

See Patient, page 4
Experience Continued from page 1

staff. One thing she found was that our system would benefit from a dedicated team focused on the HHC experience, with experience advisors and patient advocates (see page 5).

Based on her findings, the system has created a centralized Office of Patient/Customer Experience, identified three areas most in need of attention and committed to implementing six best practices aimed at addressing some of the top staff and customer concerns (see details on page 3).

The good news, she said, is that we can build on many existing mechanisms, including our immersion in the H3W leadership behaviors and our transition to daily management to help build or re-build a culture where the needs of the patient always comes first.

“This organization is so ready for this sort of work,” Pallotta said. And we cannot afford not to do it.

“If people don’t come here, nothing else matters,” Pallotta said. “We have to deliver not just on high-quality clinical care but on the patient experience.”

Flaks said he knows that HHC’s patient-satisfaction scores do not accurately reflect the commitment, dedication, energy and values of HHC’s 18,000-plus employees. But somehow, we are collectively missing the mark.

“We’re going to be a different place a year from now,” Flaks said.

“Improving the patient experience is the number one thing we should be doing in our organization. It’s the right thing to do. We will unleash the hearts and minds of all the members of Hartford HealthCare. We are declaring that this will be our highest level of commitment and how we differentiate this health system. We are all in.”

HHC Chief Operating Officer Jeff Flaks speaks at the Patient Experience Showcase earlier this month.

Scenes from the 2016 Patient Experience Showcase
We’ll Focus on These Three Areas

**Service excellence**
Treating our patients and each other in a consistent, polite, professional way. This means living up to our core values: Integrity, Caring, Excellence and Safety

**Environment**
This encompasses the basics such as cleanliness, décor and food. Patient rooms and public areas should be spotless. If you see trash in a hallway, please pick it up. Think about the impression that stained carpets and chairs make on our customers. Even a cluttered desk can give the impression that we are overwhelmed.

**Communication**
It’s not only what we say, but how we say it.
- Remember to use our H3W Leadership Behaviors.
- Think about your tone in e-mails, phone conversations and in your interactions with co-workers and customers.
- Did you explain a prescription or a procedure in a way that the patient understands?
- Did you deliver information at the right time? Right after someone is given a cancer diagnosis is not the right time to detail all of the types of chemo you will use to fight it.

We’ll Use Six Best Practices

**Interactive Leadership Rounds**
Every HHC leader (director and above) will regularly visit with employees, patients and families. We will ask: “Is there anything that would make your stay here/job better?”

**Clinical (Nurse) Manager Rounding**
Nurse managers will visit every patient on their unit at least once a day and ask if everything’s OK.

**Purposeful Hourly Rounding**
Every patient will be seen by a clinical employee every hour. When patients know they can expect someone in less than an hour, they feel less fear, and are reassured you will be there to help if they need you. This reduces their use of the call light, and makes patients more comfortable.

**Patient and Family Advisory Councils**
Groups of patients and their families will meet regularly in each local area to provide feedback about the service they received and suggest improvements.

**Experience Education Series**
We will standardize the way we educate our employees about patient experience. Everyone will understand: What is patient experience? Why is it important?

**Patient Journals**
We will standardize the use of patient journals throughout HHC. Each patient will receive one when they are admitted. The journal will be a hard copy document that outlines what inpatients can expect during their stay, and can be used to record pertinent information or questions.
of the graveness of his condition when she watched from a waiting room as nurses rushed down the hall, providing emergency resuscitation for her husband using a manual ventilator.

Joanne recounted the experience — a nearly two-week ordeal — and recalled every staff member’s facial expression, their body language, and every random act of kindness.

Dr. Kombert recovered, and Joanne healed, too, but both will always remember how the experience affected them.

In their own words....

Dr. Dan Kombert

“Every one of us makes a difference. No matter what you do in the hospital. Whether you are at the bedside or not, you make a difference. However, until you’re a patient, you just don’t realize it.”

“In the room, you get bored, so I listen. I listen to every word you say in that hallway.”

“They stood there while I was going to the bathroom, talking over my head about difficulties at the hospital. It de-humanized me even more.”

“No one cares about the antibiotic they got. No one cares about what meds they are getting. It’s the people who you interact with that make a difference. They define your experience in the hospital.”

Joanne Kombert, RN

“What you say and how you say it, what you do and how you do it, these actions can bring someone through their darkest hour or it can bring someone to their knees.”

On the ICU unit clerk who greeted her every day with a bright, welcoming smile: “Her kind words and warm smile helped me get down that hallway a little easier.”

On how the care team communicated with her: “My head was foggy. A concept that would have been simple to me [outside of this situation] was not.”

Recalling a nurse who walked her to the waiting room instead of simply pointing the way: “If I had gotten lost, I would have emotionally lost it. At that moment, I realized the value of those simple acts of kindness.”

“You may forget the interaction you have with a family member when you move on to your next patient, but that family member remembers the interaction forever.”

Stacie Pallotta leads HHC’s Patient Experience Initiative

Stacie Pallotta is a consultant with Press Ganey, currently serving as HHC’s interim chief experience officer.

Prior to working with Press Ganey, Pallotta was a senior leader at the Cleveland Clinic, most recently holding the position of senior director of the Office of Patient Experience.

Stacie earned a Master’s of Public Health degree from Case Western Reserve University, and a combined Bachelor of Science/Bachelor of Arts in biology and psychology from Marietta College in Ohio.

3 Quick Tips You Can Use Every Day

1. Listen actively

2. Show caring by helping to coordinate care

3. Use familiar tools (huddles, H3W leadership behaviors) in new ways

— Stacie Pallotta
Hartford HealthCare is creating a centralized Office of Patient/Customer Experience

Hartford HealthCare is creating a centralized Office of Patient/Customer Experience

Stacie Pallotta
Chief Experience Officer (Interim)

System Director, Office of Patient and Customer Experience

Strategic Experience Advisors

Dave Fichandler
Hartford Region

Gail Millerick
Central Region

Aimee Sturmer
Central Region

Shawna Cain
Behavioral Health

HHC MG

Adrianne DeVivo
Manager, Patient Advocacy and Complaint Management

Joe Rapisarda
Patient Advocate, Hartford Region

Carmen Diaz
Patient Advocate, Hartford Region

Lillianna Reinhard
Patient Advocate, Central Region

Dawn Simoneau
Patient Advocate, East Region

All Hands on Deck:

Although the new Experience Office will lead the initiative, it will only succeed with involvement at every level of the organization.

HHC Executive Experience Council

Sets the strategy and vision at the highest levels of HHC.

HHC Patient Experience Council

Plans and monitors actions we are taking to improve patient experience. This group will evaluate new ideas and determine new best practices to be used system-wide.

Local Patient Experience Committees

Every affiliate will have one. Reviews and interprets local patient experience scores, recognizes local successes and recommends areas to be modified.
We know what to do

As asked to jot down one word or phrase to show you care, the audience at the Patient Experience Showcase had no trouble coming up with the answers. It’s living them every day that can be challenging.

- Say hello (in the hall or elevator)
- Eye Contact
- Listen
- Ask: How can I help you?
- Be in the moment and fully present
- Follow up
- Follow through
- Listen and Share
- Touch
- Body language
- Take time and display discretionary effort

To learn more, visit HHC’s new Patient & Customer Experience page on the HHC Connect intranet.

Watch highlights of the Fourth Annual HHC Patient Experience Showcase.