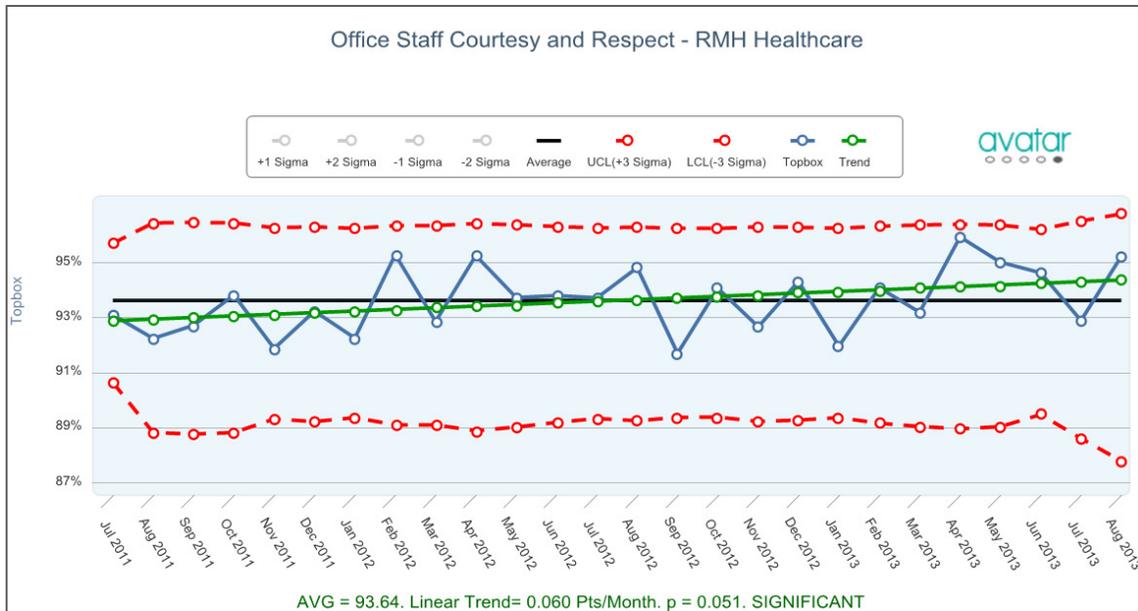




Poor customer service is a reflection of leadership.

So goes a business tenet favored by Mary Coleman, a veteran healthcare leader in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Like many healthcare professionals, Mary has seen firsthand the impact that flawed leadership can have on customer service, and consequently on the patient. But she also knows that the opposite is true. Mary has been involved in a recent initiative to measure and improve the patient experience at RMH Healthcare, where she is Director of Specialty Clinics. With the positive outcomes the initiative has generated, Mary's tenet is now delivered with a caveat – that leadership, when applied correctly, also has the power to drive and support world-class customer service.

A member of Sentara Healthcare System comprising multiple primary care and specialty clinics, RMH Healthcare employs 72 physicians and advanced-practitioners, and has a staff of over 2,600 individuals. Since July 2011, when RMH Healthcare transitioned to the CG-CAHPS Survey, the organization has been a top quartile performer in the Avatar Solutions National Database for the CG-CAHPS Courtesy and Respect Composite. Including over 10,000 survey responses and a combined Top Box percentage score of **93.72%** between February 2012 and February 2013, the survey scores achieved by RMH Healthcare are a direct reflection of the strong patient service-focus supported by leadership and front-line staff alike, and results continue to improve.



Source: www.improvinacare.com

Overview of Approach

RMH believes that achieving top-tier performance begins with holding staff accountable to the organization's standards of behavior and values, the latter of which are **Safety, Effectiveness, Respect, Value, Integrity, Compassion, and Excellence**. In support of these values, RMH has outlined standards of behavior to which each employee is expected to adhere. These behaviors fall into several categories, including:

- **Safety Awareness**
- **Appearance**
- **Positive Impressions**
- **Teamwork**
- **Confidentiality and Privacy**
- **Service Recovery**

Within these overarching categories, RMH Healthcare has described how each behavior should look and feel, an approach to modeling the behavioral standards in a way that is easy for employees to understand and assimilate. For example, employees are reminded never to complain about their day. "Our days are never worse than the day our patients are having," says Mary Coleman.

Where many organizations' measures to promote a shared service culture would end here, leadership at RMH Healthcare has demonstrated further commitment by integrating these values and behaviors into the employee hiring and performance review processes. During each employee performance

*Service excellence is the distinguishing factor of great organizations. For RMH to be the best, **we must have a clear understanding of the service excellence standards we aspire to, and we must each be accountable to demonstrate them** in our daily activities of meeting patient expectations.*

– Jim Krauss, President
RMH Healthcare

review, the employee is rated on how well they upheld the RMH Healthcare values and behaviors throughout the year. One by one, each requirement is rated on an *Exceeds, Meets, or Does Not Meet* scale. Patient compliments and complaints are integral to the review process and are used to help support each aspect of the overall performance rating.

RMH Healthcare has also empowered employees to meet these behavioral expectations through training that includes extensive review of the standards and examples of how providing exceptional service at RMH looks and feels. All staff view training videos, some of which provide the voice of employees and patients who have received care at RMH Healthcare.

Encouraging further employee support of the service culture, RMH Healthcare has an Employee Success Sharing Program offering staff the opportunity to earn up to \$750 in bonuses for the year.

The incentive is split into thirds based on achievement of goals regarding quality, financial, and customer service performance. This successful program has helped focus employee efforts in critical areas for the organization.

At RMH Healthcare, meetings are structured to highlight successes and failures regarding the patient experience. The goal of this approach is to facilitate the sharing of best practices and ideas among leaders. As the chair of the patient experience steering committee, the COO attends these meetings and requires leaders to report on action plans and data for inpatient and outpatient patient care service areas. This collaboration among leaders and sharing of methods for improving the patient experience has proved a successful strategy for RMH Healthcare.

Utilization of patient surveys to measure the patient experience is an important component of RMH Healthcare's service improvement strategy. Survey results and patient comments are shared at meetings and related back to the organization's mission, vision, and values. Whenever possible, staff members associated with positive patient comments are recognized. Beginning meetings in this fashion helps provide a sense of pride and purpose for employees. In addition, time is allotted to review, discuss, and set action plans based on survey data. Outside of meetings, leaders of the clinics take time to pull comments from www.improvingcare.com and send them to the appropriate staff member or

provider with a note acknowledging the outstanding care they delivered.

Supportive Best Practices

Key leadership practices that have enabled RMH Healthcare to achieve success on the Courtesy and Respect Composite include daily rounding on staff, rounding on patients, and actively monitoring call center patient calls for exceptional customer service, as well as coaching opportunities for staff. RMH Healthcare believes it is important

to spend time each day with front-line staff to understand what is going well, what needs attention, and who can be recognized for outstanding work. Rounding on patients further helps system leaders identify how well care is being delivered, from the moment the patient enters the facility to discharge. Leveraging these practices and Avatar Solutions' assistance with CG-CAHPS, RMH Healthcare is better positioned than ever to continue supporting a world-class patient experience.