

## Innovative Practices: Insights from Institute Founding Executive Council

# Storytelling as a Strategic Initiative

### Overview

There is a business imperative to move the needle on patient experience performance. While data are important to demonstrate that change is needed, when they are presented with context they are more powerful. Stories provide that context. A compelling care story engages, incentivizes and can inspire employees to improve patient experience in a way that cannot be achieved through data alone.

Health care organizations across the country are leveraging the rich detail of patient comments, stories, and vignettes to inspire employees and clinicians throughout the enterprise. At Press Ganey's 2015 National Client Conference, the Institute for Innovation's Founding Executive Council convened to share practices and insights on leveraging storytelling as a strategic initiative. We are pleased to summarize and share these insights.

### Storytelling Practices

#### Adventist Health System: Top Storytelling Award Encourages Sharing and Healthy Competition

Adventist Health System's intranet story portal allows care team members to record stories of exceptional patient care. These stories provide inspiring content for hospital leaders to start their internal meetings and create some friendly competition among Adventist hospitals.

- Storytelling award. According to Pam Guler, Vice President Patient Experience and Chief Experience Officer, system hospitals enjoy vying for the top storytelling award granted at the organization's annual summit. At last year's summit, the award was given to the hospital with the most stories submitted through the portal. This year, the award focused on how hospitals are using stories. Every hospital's C-suite submitted an application describing how they are leveraging patient stories. The winning organization—chosen by Adventist's CEO—shared its comprehensive work with Schwartz Rounds. Another hospital described how it is sharing patient stories throughout the community. The greatest benefit of the award process is that it helps hospitals network and share their story practices.
- Starting at the top. Adventist's CEO personally leverages patient stories by sharing "Mission Moments," video-recorded patient stories that speak to how Adventist caregivers carry out the organization's mission every day. Guler says that having a CEO who believes in the importance of patient stories cascades down through all hospital leaders and to frontline staff. Sharing patient stories help reinforce the organization's mission and commitment to exceptional care.

#### Baptist Health South Florida: Storytelling at Board Meetings, Leadership Development Institute

Baptist Health South Florida uses storytelling to add an emotional component to its patient experience data. Dr. Thinkh Tran, Chief Medical and Quality Officer, Corporate Vice President relates that any data presented at Board meetings are coupled with patient stories. Patient vignettes are also included whenever the system publishes data for an entity (e.g., hospital, outpatient clinic). In addition, a Baptist

Health patient and his or her family members are always invited to the organization's annual Leadership Development Institute to represent the patient voice.

### **Brigham and Women's Hospital: "Love Story" Videos**

Brigham and Women's Hospital models its "Love Stories" project after the movie, "When Harry Met Sally." The organization creates internal videos of a physician and a patient seated side by side, sharing details about their relationship. Off camera, an interviewer asks the "couple" questions such as, "How did you meet?", "Did you have any doubts?" Dr. Tom Lee, Press Ganey's Chief Medical Officer, says the goal of each vignette is to show that the physician-patient relationship is indeed a loving, authentic relationship. The stories engage Brigham and Women's employees and clinicians, demonstrate the importance of relationship in health care, and complement the organization's use of patient experience data.

### **Carolinas Health Care System: Small Team Exercises**

Carolinas Health Care System convenes frontline teammates at meetings to explore the concept of preventing avoidable patient suffering. According to Connie Bonebrake, Senior Vice President at Carolinas, one storytelling exercise that has proven to be impactful is having teammates work in small groups to create a story in response to images that depict individuals in various stressful circumstances (e.g., bankruptcy, homelessness, multi-tasking mom). Every story created by various groups is unique yet they have all captured the impact of stress and helped teammates recognize the impact of unresolved stress can have on them as teammates. One image depicts a man holding his head in his hands with mounds of paper in front of him. One frontline nurse told the story of the overwhelming stress experienced by a health care executive trying to manage competing organizational priorities. These types of responses provide effective segues into discussions around teammate wellness and resiliency as well as the prevention of avoidable patient suffering.

### **Northwell (formerly North Shore LIJ Health System): Connect to Original Career Inspiration**

Sven Gierlinger, Chief Experience Officer at North Shore LIJ Health System, says, "Everyone has a story of why they got into health care in the first place." This includes executives who are often so focused on running the business that they forget the reason they chose a career in health care. North Shore LIJ uses the art of storytelling to help its executives connect back to their original inspiration. Executives attend a four-hour retreat that centers on the themes of empathy and connectedness. They are prompted to tell several types of stories, including the story of why they got into health care as well as a story about giving or receiving empathy.

The stories are transformative. Executives who may not have been known for expressing themselves openly are frequently among the first to share their stories. Teams that have worked together for years often are unaware of why their colleagues got into health care. Knowing each other's stories is a powerful way to build meaningful connections.

North Shore LIJ also leverages the power of negative patient stories. For example, after a patient posted an unfavorable comment about the organization on a social media outlet, Gierlinger personally called the patient to hear about the experience. After listening to the story, he invited the patient to come in for an interview so that the story could be recorded. A video of the seven-minute interview was shown after lunch at a senior leader retreat as a contrast to a positive patient story that was shared before the lunch break. The contrast between the positive and negative patient care stories was so powerful that senior leaders still talk about it today with their teams.

### **UCLA Health System: Building Direct Caregiver Stories in Their Time and Space**

UCLA Health System incorporates storytelling by bringing stories of exceptional patient care directly to their caregivers. For example, they will gather a group of leaders together to go to the plastic surgery clinic, a nursing unit huddle, etc. and spend five minutes sharing a patient's story of how the care team made a difference. Tony Padilla, Director of Patient Affairs, says the organization strives to make these meetings convenient for direct caregivers by holding them "in their time, in their space, with their team." Padilla reflects that bringing patients themselves to these meetings may be a positive enhancement for the organization to consider.

### **University of Chicago Medicine: Recognize Moments that Make a Difference Every Day**

University of Chicago Medicine's "Making a Difference Every Day" program centers on the question, "How do we change a world?" and is designed to help employees and clinicians understand that they are surrounded by "change a world" moments with patients every day. According to Dr. Alison Tothy, Chief Experience and Engagement Officer, the goal is for every employee and clinician in the system—not only frontline staff—to learn to recognize these moments and to strive to make a difference in the lives of patients each day.

As a result of the program, stories of exceptional patient experiences surface frequently. The organization leverages these stories at their quarterly "Making a Difference Every Day Best Practices Forum." For the first year of the forum, the agenda was highly data driven. At the event, attendees heard about employees and clinicians who were recognized for providing great care, but not in the form of storytelling. Attendance began to wane. To revitalize the forums, the organization started incorporating patient stories into the agenda.

University of Chicago Medicine standardizes the process of identifying and developing the patient stories presented during the forums. The five-step process includes:

1. **Identifying Patients:** Exceptional patient experiences are identified through discharge care calls and patient survey comments.
2. **Interviewing Patients:** Patients and family members are interviewed about their experience to prepare them for the questions that will be asked during the forum.
3. **Identifying Care Teams:** During the pre-forum interview, patients identify members of their care team that they would like to join them on stage.
4. **Prepping Care Teams:** Care team members are prepared with the questions that will be asked of them during the forum.
5. **Promoting the Event:** The upcoming forum is advertised throughout the organization.

At the event, University of Chicago Medicine senior leadership delivers an opening address and introduces the patient and family members. The Patient Experience Leadership Team interviews the patient using a "talk show" format as an engaging way to help them share their story. Patients are asked questions such as, "Why did this work" and "Why do you love your caregivers?" The interview then shifts focus toward the care team and how they worked together to create such an exceptional experience for the patient.

After the forum, certificates and thank-you cards are provided to the patient and family members. In some instances, patients are invited to become more active in the organization's activities. Some patients have

joined University of Chicago Medicine's advisory boards, attended unit huddles, and participated in quality improvement initiatives such as operational experience mapping.

Forum attendance has increased since incorporating patient stories into the agenda. Challenges still exist, including getting more representation from frontline staff at the events. The organization is working through these challenges so that patient stories can reach more caregivers. For example, the forums are recorded and made available via the intranet so that segments of the event can be shared at department meetings.

University of Chicago Medicine's best practices forums are an emotional experience for both patients and caregivers. They give patients an opportunity to express heartfelt thanks to their care team. From the caregiver perspective, patient stories connect back to the Making a Difference Every Day mission and help remind them of why they chose a career in health care. To reinforce that reminder, the organization has created an inspiring video compilation of caregiver quotes and photos called "Remembering Why."

### **Yale-New Haven Hospital: Narratives at Monthly Service Line PX Forums**

Dr. Michael Bennick, Associate Chief of Medicine, Medical Director, Patient Experience at Yale-New Haven Hospital, observes that "Data tend to blind and stories tend to engage." To that point, when Dr. Bennick opened Yale-New Haven's annual patient experience conference this year, he started with a slide showing a graphic of the organization's patient experience performance. He then had the slide fade into a compilation of patient and caregiver photos to emphasize that there are thousands of stories behind the data.

The organization recognizes some of these stories during service-line patient experience forums. On a monthly basis, every service line at Yale-New Haven holds a patient experience forum during which they share a story of exceptional patient care. The patients and families involved in the story attend the event as well to participate in the experience and to celebrate the care team.

Yale-New Haven has also implemented efforts designed to keep their patients' personal stories front and center, even at the bedside. For example, family members are encouraged to create a communication board that can be displayed in the patient's room depicting the patient's life and interests. The board tells the patient's story and helps caregivers to see the patient as a person, distinct from their medical condition.

The organization also believes in the power of the narrative. The author of *Cutting for Stone*, Abraham Verghese, was invited to discuss how to create a potent narrative. In addition, the organization began training undergraduates to interview patients about their life stories using open-ended questioning techniques. After each patient is interviewed, the student writes the patient's story, gives it to the patient to review, and then laminates the story and gives it to the patient as a gift. The patient's story is also included in the "FY!" section of the electronic medical record.

### **Concluding Insights**

Storytelling can be a powerful motivator for change. For example, after hearing a patient story, Cleveland Clinic physicians were driven to institute a same-day appointment policy. The patient called the urology department with concerns and was told that there were no openings for two weeks. The patient ended up in the emergency department within hours of trying to schedule the appointment.

Storytelling can also be a powerful source of inspiration. Stories of exceptional care instill pride in the organization and illustrate what care should look like for every patient. They celebrate the hard work caregivers do every day to reduce patient suffering and serve as reminders of why they chose a career in health care in the first place. According to Dr. Lee, “What we’re trying to do is make them better for the next patient they see and help them see themselves in a light that sustains them as they go about their work.”

Patient stories engage: they contain character, conflict and resolution - all elements that are that complement and enhance data. “When I go to get funding for a program, stories are great, but the first question we’re asked is, ‘Is it going to make a difference in the data?’” says Dr. Tothy. The combination of data and stories can make the most compelling business cases. John Bingham, Vice President, Performance Improvement and Chief Quality Officer at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center agrees, “Isn’t it the best of both worlds when you can combine good data with good stories that link—it seems like that’s where the sweet spot is.”