



Questions and Answers

Why are we calling this initiative “customer service”? We don’t serve customers.

It’s true that we don’t serve customers in the traditional sense; we serve patients, and in some settings, clients. However, we have chosen to use the term “customer service” because it’s a concept with which we’re all familiar. Each of us knows what exceptional customer service looks like and feels like in other settings. While service is demonstrated differently in a health care setting than in a for-profit setting, what remains consistent is respect, kindness and courtesy.

Will all employees, physicians, learners and volunteers be required to take customer service training?

Yes. To provide consistently exceptional service to our patients, families and visitors and to each other as colleagues, we need to have a common understanding of the behaviours that contribute to service excellence. We must be able to demonstrate these behaviours in every interaction. Consistent training and support will be key to our success.

Am I going to be expected to do more on top of my other job duties?

This program requires that staff, physicians, learners and volunteers consistently demonstrate expected service behaviours. These behaviours are simple to follow and are not time-consuming. In fact, following these behaviours consistently should make your job easier and more satisfying by reducing miscommunication and misunderstanding, reducing complaints and increasing patient satisfaction. If you are already demonstrating these behaviours in every interaction, keep doing exactly what you are doing.

Isn’t customer service more of a private sector goal? Shouldn’t we focus on providing the best clinical care we can?

Creating a positive patient experience is very closely tied to creating a culture of safety (***Institute for Healthcare Improvement***). Patients, clients and families have been telling us for years that how we serve them – how we listen, how we speak and how we respond – is every bit as important as the clinical care and treatment we provide. That’s why we’ve named “building a culture of customer service” a strategic priority.

Does this mean we’re not providing good service now?

There are many examples of exceptional service at Capital Health. Yet every day, we hear from patients and families who have experienced the opposite of service – a lack of empathy or a breakdown in communication. Each of us has experienced the impact of customer service in a store or restaurant, both good and bad. In a for-profit setting, bad customer service is frustrating. In health care, it’s unacceptable. Our patients have a right to exceptional service. Every time.

Isn’t providing good service just common sense?

Providing good service is a skill, and like any skill, it has to be developed. Some people are naturally service-oriented and others have to work harder at it. To provide exceptional service consistently, we need every person at Capital Health to know what service behaviours are expected of them. Then we need to provide the training, tools and supports to embed these in everyday practice. We want patients and families to consistently experience excellent service whenever and wherever they interact with Capital Health.



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How can staff be expected to provide good service when we still have issues like long wait times and aging infrastructure?

We will continue to face challenges, including long wait times and aging buildings and equipment, and we will continue to work to address these issues. Regardless of these challenges, we have a commitment to provide exceptional service. This doesn't mean meeting unrealistic demands or even resolving the many challenges that face us daily. It means seeing each patient, client, family member or co-worker as a person – someone who needs our help and our compassion – and doing everything in our power to make their experience at Capital Health as positive as possible.

How are we going to make sure people are held accountable for providing exceptional service?

Creating a culture of customer service will require much more than training. That's why we are also working to embed this service focus into existing structures – job postings, hiring, performance reviews and recognition. The customer service strategic stream is and will continue to be closely aligned with both the transformational leadership and accountability strategic streams, ensuring that exceptional customer service is not just an expectation but a requirement.

How will we measure success?

While success can be measured in a number of ways, one specific measure we have named is a 20-point increase in the percentage of patients responding most favourably (i.e. "strongly agree") on customer service related questions on our patient experience survey. We also expect to see a decrease in the number of patient complaints related to poor customer service.

Where did this program come from?

We have adopted this best practice program from the Cleveland Clinic in the US. The Cleveland Clinic has had significant success in increasing both patient satisfaction and staff engagement through its shift to a more service-oriented culture. In 2008, they ranked in the 55th percentile for patient satisfaction in the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Health Plans Survey (HCAPS). In 2012, patient satisfaction had increased to the 92nd percentile. In the same timeframe, staff engagement increased from the 38th percentile to the 57th percentile. Several Canadian health care organizations have also adopted the Cleveland Clinic model, including Mt. Sinai and Rouge Valley, both in Ontario.

How much is this program costing Capital Health? How can you justify spending money on this when we have other pressing needs?

The cost per participant is less than \$23 for four hours of training and ongoing support. Over three years, the cost of the program, including intellectual property costs, licensing, materials, staffing (a half-time learning co-ordinator), a recognition program and a fix-it fund to address minor patient experience concerns, amounts to \$316,000. Given the strong link between a positive patient experience and patient safety and satisfaction, we feel this is a very worthwhile investment. We hope that this program will also increase staff satisfaction by providing skills and tools that are helpful in the day-to-day work of employees, physicians, learners and volunteers.