
Customer Service

THE SERVICE-PROVIDER ATTITUDE

One way in which quality, cost-effective services can be provided to patients is by hiring and training aides to assist in the delivery of therapeutic services. This frees the therapists to help patients with the more demanding aspects of therapy. Supervising therapists work to ensure that quality care to patients isn't compromised. There are several ways in which a supervising therapist can ensure that quality care is provided by all therapeutic staff. These include the following.

1. *Interviewing and hiring.* This process should be carefully and thoughtfully completed by the supervising therapist (Figure 1). All job candidates must present qualities such as the following:
 - The desire to care for patients in a health care setting
 - The desire to work with other health care providers as a team
 - A willingness to accept constructive criticism gracefully
 - A strong work ethic, punctuality, and diligence

FIGURE 1—The job interview is an important step in building an effective health care team.



2. *Training.* Supervisors are responsible for thoroughly training aides in the appropriate areas, including
 - Clerical support, clinic maintenance, and treatment set-up
 - Direct patient care and therapeutic-specific duties
 - Customer service and obtaining a “service provider attitude” (*Customer service* includes the day-to-day interaction with patients and their family members, coworkers, supervisors, and any member of the general public involved with the facility.)
3. *Competency testing.* Supervisors are responsible for administering competency testing to all employed aides so that the aides can demonstrate their abilities in all areas in which they’ve been trained. Competency testing is usually administered on an annual basis.
4. *Performance appraisal.* It’s important that supervisors regularly evaluate the job performance of aides to make sure tasks are being performed correctly. Appraisals are derived from predetermined job standards based on the job description.

5. *Disciplinary action.* Supervisors must take disciplinary action against employees when it's warranted. Disciplinary measures are an attempt to correct unacceptable behavior on the part of the employee.

Earlier units in your program focused on the specific tasks you'll be performing in the therapeutic setting. This unit focuses on behavior that's much more difficult to measure, namely, customer service and your ability to provide it to everyone you come into contact with in your facility. It's important that you put the ideas discussed in this unit to use, so you can master them. Your on-the-job supervisor will help you gain such skills by providing you with feedback on how well you're doing in these areas.

In order for you to become and remain a valued member of the health care team, you must develop skills in the areas that relate to customer service in health care. These include

Fostering positive relationships with clients (patients), staff, supervisors, and the public

- Developing effective communication skills with clients, staff, supervisors, and the public
- Developing and maintaining your role as team player
- Developing stress-management skills

Fostering Positive Relationships

Supervisory Personnel

Developing a good, strong relationship with your supervisor is essential for establishing a positive work environment. The number of supervisors to whom you report may vary by the facility. No matter how many supervisors you have, however, it's important that you work at developing a professional, courteous relationship with all of them.

Your supervisor will provide you with the following:

1. *Written job description.* This is a formal summary of your responsibilities and requirements (Figure 2). The job description you receive typically includes your
 - Job title
 - Department
 - Supervisor’s title
 - Educational and/or physical requirements
 - Primary responsibilities
 - Basic responsibilities
 - Other responsibilities

SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION	
POSITION TITLE:	Aide
DEPARTMENT:	Health and Fitness Therapy
SUPERVISOR:	Director of Therapy
EDUCATIONAL/PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS AND QUALIFICATIONS:	Minimum of a high school diploma Frequent heavy lifting in excess of 70 pounds Good general physical health and emotional stability Pass and maintain basic competencies defined and documented by department head
PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES:	Perform delegated, selected, skilled tasks in specific situations assigned by a therapy practitioner, as well as under the direction and intense supervision of a therapy practitioner
BASIC RESPONSIBILITIES:	Communicate in oral and written format Comprehend oral and written instruction Successfully pass competency testing; failure to pass competency testing will result in termination from position

(Continued)

FIGURE 2—Example of a Typical Written Job Description

SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION—(Continued)

BASIC RESPONSIBILITIES:

Follow directions from the therapist regarding client care and department functions

Assist with patient care, including transporting, transferring, setting up tasks, routine toileting and dressing, and assisting with equipment

Maintain a clean, organized work space

Perform clerical tasks, including filing, typing, phone/faxing, billing, copying, mailing, scheduling, and organizing work space

Perform clinic-maintenance activities, including transporting and cleaning equipment, stocking items, setting up equipment, organizing work space, and inventorying supplies

Use appropriate verbal and nonverbal communication when working with clients and other staff

Report client concerns in a timely manner

Maintain equipment in safe working order; report damaged equipment and submit a work order for repair to the OT Director

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES:

Conform to dress code standards

Meet or exceed facility attendance expectations

Meet facility infection control practice

Participate in department meetings and inservices as assigned by management

Demonstrate knowledge and practice of universal precautions when appropriate

Complete annual tuberculosis (TB) testing and report findings in writing

Complete HIB (Hepta vax) series of three vaccinations with documentation or submit form for refusal of HIB vaccination series

Maintain strict client confidentiality

Successfully complete cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification

Perform other related duties as assigned by personnel authorized by the supervisor or as may be required to meet emergency situations

Approved by: _____ **Review date:** _____

FIGURE 2—Continued

2. *On-site training.* You'll be provided with any additional training you need by your supervisor in the facility. This will ensure that you've had hands-on learning before you work directly with patients.
3. *Competence testing.* You'll be tested in all areas of competency by your supervisor. This may include written or oral responses to questions or demonstrations of your skills. Competency testing ensures the safety of all involved by making sure you're using appropriate techniques and complying with standard facility procedures.
4. *Performance appraisal.* Your performance appraisal will include written and oral feedback given by your supervisor on your job performance. This feedback will help you become more effective at your job by helping you pinpoint those areas where you may need additional training.

Some of the things you can do to develop a positive relationship with your supervisor include

- Asking about your expected job performance, so you know exactly what your job duties are and the level of competence at which you should be working
- Asking for clarification whenever you're unsure of your responsibilities
- Learning how to gracefully accept corrective criticism and correcting any behaviors which bring on such criticism
- Respecting your supervisor's time, keeping in mind that he or she has many responsibilities

Teammates and Other Facility Personnel

When you're working with other members of the rehabilitative team (from your department or from other facilities or departments), it's important for you to provide timely, accurate information about therapeutic services you've given to patients. Doing so ensures that the patient will receive the highest-quality care possible.

You should also treat all colleagues with fairness, discretion, and integrity. Many businesses, including health care facilities, believe that the “customer” is any person with whom the service provider is in contact. By that definition, some of your “customers” include the people you work with in your department and people from other departments and facilities, patient family members, and the general public. You, in turn, are a “customer” of those very same people. Quality care for customers includes courteous service to patients, as well as to coworkers, colleagues, and facility visitors.

Patients and Patient Families

To develop positive relationships with patients, you must be empathetic. Being *empathetic* means being aware of and understanding the thoughts, feelings, and general situations of patients in your care (Figure 3).



FIGURE 3—You’ll be more effective with patients if you take the time to understand what they’re feeling and thinking.

Patients who are dealing with some disability or disease may be vulnerable and perhaps suffering physically, mentally, or emotionally. They also may be experiencing some form of loss, including any or all of the following:

1. *Loss of physical or mental functioning.* Patients may be unable to perform activities that were common for them at one time.
2. *Loss of self-image.* Patients may lose their former self-image, including confidence regarding their physical appearance. A sick or injured person may feel undesirable or unwanted. Patients need time to adjust to changes in their bodies and in their lives. They may need to express their feelings and concerns about these changes. Patients will distrust you if you try to tell them that everything will be just as it was, because they know this isn't so.
3. *Loss associated with hospitalization.* Patients experience many losses associated with hospitalization, especially if the hospitalization continues for an extended period of time. Some hospital-associated losses include
 - Disruptions in the person's social and financial life
 - Psychological defeats involved in battling disease (Being admitted to the hospital may feel like defeat.)
 - Losing control over one's life—leaving one's health and life in the hands of others
 - Losing the familiar—the hospital may be an unfamiliar setting with different rules and expectations
 - Losing the home (even temporarily)—loss of physical and psychological comfort, control over one's environment, and the familiarity of objects, routines, people, and pets
 - Losing one's privacy—walls are replaced by curtains, making private space limited (health professionals and others may enter without warning; hospital gowns bare all; patients can't have private conversations or even a "good cry" without being overheard)

- Loss of independence—many restrictions are imposed on patients by the health care facility to ensure patient safety (For example, the patient may have to ring the nurse call-bell to use the bathroom.)
- Loss of friends/support systems—the sick or injured individual may feel like less of a person in a society that values health and independence above all else; some patients feel ashamed of their situation and themselves
- Uncertainty about the future (Patients may be uncertain about their medical, physical, social, and financial future. They may become frightened, distressed, or depressed over these uncertainties.)

Therapeutic Relationships and Approaches

You're a member of a health care team. Patients will put their trust in you simply because of your position. You must handle this trust carefully. There are a variety of methods you may use to encourage and help patients who are experiencing loss while participating in therapy.

1. *Remind patients who are experiencing the loss of physical or mental functions of what they're still able to do.* For example, while a patient may not yet be able to walk, he or she may still be able to get to the gift shop while pushing his or her wheelchair. Remind him or her of this accomplishment.
2. *Sincerely compliment patients who are experiencing the loss of self-image as a result of their illnesses or injuries.* For example, say things like, "Mr. Smith, you've combed your hair so nicely," or "Juanita, that's a beautiful shirt. Did your granddaughter give it to you?"

3. *Listen to and validate the feelings of the patient (Figure 4).* For example, if a patient reports that he or she is feeling grumpy, remarks that “everything has gone wrong,” and, to top it all off, his or her breakfast was cold, you might respond, “It must be frustrating not to be able to make breakfast the way you like it.” Patients will respond to you in a more positive manner if they perceive that you truly care about their situation.

FIGURE 4—Validating the feelings of the patient can go a long way towards helping him or her cope.



4. *Recognize that any patient’s choices are limited in a hospital, and offer choices to patients whenever it’s safely possible.* For example, questions such as “Ms. Vasquez, would you like to wait for your therapist in the waiting area or in your room?” or “Mr. Ling, would you like to paint your ceramic vase yellow or red?” may help patients feel more in control of their circumstances.
5. *Whenever safely possible, allow patients to be in control of a situation.* Some remarks that illustrate this are: “Santos, do you like to comb your hair or brush your teeth first?” or “Mary, would you like the window blinds open or closed?”

6. *Recognize a patient's homesickness and carefully and respectfully inquire about the patient's home and familiar surroundings.* For example, ask questions like, "Betty, is this a picture of your dog?" or "Did you have visitors over the weekend, Alex?"
7. *Respect a patient's right to privacy.* If it's safe to do so, leave patients alone when they request it. Allow patients to have personal space. Some ways you can provide patients with privacy include
 - Knocking before entering a patient's room or bathroom, and waiting for a response before entering
 - Closing the privacy curtain whenever the patient may be exposed
 - Using towels, sheets, or other items to help the patient "cover up" during treatment
 - Maintaining the patient's confidentiality (Don't discuss the patient's care or situation with anyone except your direct supervisor or other caregivers. When speaking to the patient, do so in a moderate tone of voice to protect the content from those who may overhear the conversation.)
8. *Attend promptly to a patient's needs, because the patient may become discouraged by being dependent on others.* For example, offer the patient a glass of water if he looks like he needs it or as soon as he asks for it.
9. *Professionally and respectfully use the sense of touch to show support and encouragement to patients who may be experiencing loss of friends or support systems.* For example, you might gently stroke the patient's hand or give a "pat" on the back or shoulder. Of course, you should exercise caution when using touch, because some patients may become offended or agitated when touched. Use only appropriate gestures. Inappropriate touching is unacceptable and illegal.
10. *Ask patients if it's okay to use their first names.* Don't talk down to the patient or refer to them with endearing labels like "honey" or "sweetheart." Most patients find this practice offensive.

Often, the way a health care worker interacts with patients is governed by the facility's *Bill of Patient's Rights and Responsibilities*. This bill makes patients aware of the way in which they can expect to be treated in the facility. The bill also provides you with guidelines for interacting with patients. A sample Bill of Rights is provided in [Figure 5](#).

A PATIENT'S BILL OF RIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

Effective health care requires collaboration between patients and physicians and other health care professionals. Open and honest communication, respect for personal and professional values, and sensitivity to differences are integral to optimal patient care. As the setting for the provision of health services, hospitals must provide a foundation for understanding and respecting the rights and responsibilities of patients, their families, physicians, and other caregivers. Hospitals must ensure a health care ethic that respects the role of patients in decision making about treatment choices and other aspects of their care. Hospitals must be sensitive to cultural, racial, linguistic, religious, age, gender, and other differences as well as the needs of persons with disabilities.

The American Hospital Association presents A Patient's Bill of Rights with the expectation that it will contribute to more effective patient care and be supported by the hospital on behalf of the institution, its medical staff, employees, and patients. The American Hospital Association encourages health care institutions to tailor this bill of rights to their patient community by translating and/or simplifying the language of this bill of rights as may be necessary to ensure that patients and their families understand their rights and responsibilities.

BILL OF RIGHTS*

- 1. The patient has the right to considerate and respectful care.**
- 2. The patient has the right to and is encouraged to obtain from physicians and other direct caregivers relevant, current, and understandable information concerning diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis.** Except in emergencies when the patient lacks decision-making capacity and the need for treatment is urgent, the patient is entitled to the opportunity to discuss and request information related to the specific procedures and/or treatments, the risks

involved, the possible length of recuperation, and the medically reasonable alternatives and their accompanying risks and benefits.

Patients have the right to know the identity of physicians, nurses, and others involved in their care, as well as when those involved are students, residents, or other trainees. The patient also has the right to know the immediate and long-term financial implications of treatment choices, insofar as they are known.

- 3. The patient has the right to make decisions about the plan of care prior to and during the course of treatment and to refuse a recommended treatment or plan of care to the extent permitted by law and hospital policy and to be informed of the medical consequences of this action.** In case of such refusal, the patient is entitled to other appropriate care and services that the hospital provides or transfer to another hospital. The hospital should notify patients of any policy that might affect patient choice within the institution.
- 4. The patient has the right to have an advance directive (such as a living will, health care proxy, or durable power of attorney for health care) concerning treatment or designating a surrogate decision maker with the expectation that the hospital will honor the intent of that directive to the extent permitted by law and hospital policy.** Health care institutions must advise patients of their rights under state law and hospital policy to make informed medical choices, ask if the patient has an advance directive, and include that information in patient records. The patient has the right to timely information about hospital policy that may limit its ability to implement fully a legally valid advance directive.

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FIGURE 5—A Sample Patient's Bill of Rights (Reprinted with permission of the American Hospital Association, copyright 1992)

5. **The patient has the right to every consideration of privacy.** Case discussion, consultation, examination, and treatment should be conducted so as to protect each patient's privacy.
 6. **The patient has the right to expect that all communications and records pertaining to his or her care will be treated as confidential by the hospital, except in cases such as suspected abuse and public health hazards, when reporting is permitted or required by law.** The patient has the right to expect that the hospital will emphasize the confidentiality of this information when it releases it to any other parties entitled to review information in these records.
 7. **The patient has the right to review the records pertaining to his or her medical care and to have the information explained or interpreted as necessary, except when restricted by law.**
 8. **The patient has the right to expect that, within its capacity and policies, a hospital will make reasonable response to the request of a patient for appropriate and medically indicated care and services.** The hospital must provide evaluation, service, and/or referral as indicated by the urgency of the case. When medically appropriate and legally permissible, or when a patient has so requested, a patient may be transferred to another facility. The institution to which the patient is to be transferred must have accepted the patient for transfer. The patient must also have the benefit of complete information and explanation regarding the need for, risks, benefits, and alternatives to such a transfer.
 9. **The patient has the right to ask and be informed of the existence of business relationships among the hospital, educational institutions, other health care providers, or payers that may influence the patient's treatment and care.**
 10. **The patient has the right to consent to or decline to participate in proposed research studies or human experimentation affecting care and treatment or requiring direct patient involvement, and to have those studies fully explained prior to consent.** A patient who declines to participate in research or experimentation is entitled to the most effective care that the hospital can otherwise provide.
 11. **The patient has the right to expect reasonable continuity of care when appropriate and to be informed by physicians and other caregivers of available and realistic patient care options when hospital care is no longer appropriate.**
 12. **The patient has the right to be informed of hospital policies and practices that relate to patient care, treatment, and responsibilities.** The patient has the right to be informed of available resources for resolving disputes, grievances, and conflicts, such as ethics committees, patient representatives, or other mechanisms available in the institution. The patient has the right to be informed of the hospital's charges for services and available payment methods.
- The collaborative nature of health care requires that patients, or their families/surrogates, participate in their care. The effectiveness of care and patient satisfaction with the course of treatment depend, in part, on the patient fulfilling certain responsibilities. Patients are responsible for providing information about past illnesses, hospitalizations, medications, and other matters related to health status. To participate effectively in decision making, patients must be encouraged to take responsibility for requesting additional information or clarification about their health status or treatment when they do not fully understand information and instructions. Patients are also responsible for ensuring that the health care institution has a copy of their written advance directive if they have one. Patients are responsible for informing their physicians and other caregivers if they anticipate problems in following prescribed treatment.
- Patients should also be aware of the hospital's obligation to be reasonably efficient and equitable in providing care to other patients and the community. The hospital's rules and regulations are designed to help the hospital meet this obligation. Patients and their families are responsible for making reasonable accommodations to the needs of the hospital, other patients, medical staff, and hospital employees.

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FIGURE 5—Continued

Patients are responsible for providing necessary information for insurance claims and for working with the hospital to make payment arrangements, when necessary.

A person's health depends on much more than health care services. Patients are responsible for recognizing the impact of their lifestyle on their personal health.

CONCLUSION

Hospitals have many functions to perform, including the enhancement of health status, health promotion, and the prevention and treatment of injury and disease; the immediate and ongoing care and rehabilitation of patients; the education of health professionals, patients, and the community; and research. All these activities must be conducted with an overriding concern for the values and dignity of patients.

FIGURE 5—Continued



Self-Check 1

At the end of each section of *Customer Service*, you'll be asked to pause and check your understanding of what you've just read by completing a "Self-Check" exercise. Answering these questions will help you review what you've studied so far. Please complete *Self-Check 1* now.

1. List four skill areas that will help you provide more effective customer service.

2. What elements does a typical job description include?

3. When interviewing for an aide position, what personal qualities should you emphasize in yourself?

4. Name three losses that patients experience in the health care setting.

5. List four ways you can help a patient overcome the feelings of loss described in question four.

Check your answers with those on page 43.