

Client profile

Led by Vascular Surgeon Jeb Hallett, M.D., Roper Vascular Care is part of the Roper St. Francis Heart & Vascular Center in Charleston, South Carolina. The medical practice is committed to “the needs of the patient first,” providing comprehensive diagnosis, treatment, and patient education for conditions affecting the veins and arteries.

Challenge

- Improve the patient experience.
- Influence patient lifestyle choices to improve outcomes.
- Move patient satisfaction scores to excellent.

Solution

- Examine every detail of patient interaction.
- Address “dissatisfiers.”
- Commit to continuous improvement.

Results

- Improved patient experience.
- Better patient satisfaction scores.
- Positive work environment.

Playing Every Point

Moving the Patient Experience from Very Good to Excellent

“I get up in the morning and think I’m going to do good today,” says Jeb Hallett, M.D. “I spend a lot of time with my patients, examining them from top to bottom. I ask them about their families and their lives.



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“Yet, my patients’ rating of me as ‘excellent’ was only in the 43rd percentile in 2013.”

At first, Dr. Hallett, of Roper St. Francis Heart & Vascular Center in Charleston, South Carolina, thought something was wrong with the performance measurement. But his next set of numbers, still mediocre, convinced him he needed to make some changes.

Professional Research Consultants, Inc., (PRC), a custom market research and healthcare performance improvement consultancy hired by Roper St. Francis, collects performance data through telephone conversations with discharged patients.

Using these data as a starting point, Dr. Hallett began dissecting his patient interactions to determine how to improve patients’ perceptions of their experiences from very good to excellent.

“Michael Jordan said he was among the greatest at his sport, because, ‘I play every point.’ To be rated as excellent in anything you do, you have to play every point,” Dr. Hallett says.

He began by asking his wife, Linda, who is a psychiatrist, for her suggestions.

“There are people around us who observe and know us. It’s reasonable to ask them, ‘Is there anything I can do to improve my behavior?’” Dr. Hallett explains.

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Transforming the Patient Experience One Step at a Time

Linda's analysis started with his introduction. "Jeb, you're a serious man. You need to smile more," she told him.

She encouraged him to introduce himself as Jeb Hallett rather than Dr. Hallett and to ask patients how they preferred to be addressed.

Dr. Hallett combined her recommendations with ideas from his office manager and previous healthcare coaching. Through small but important changes, he boosted his percentile to 72.9 in the first half of 2014.

Here are his initial insights about better ways to satisfy patients:

1. **Find out what the patient needs today.** My medical assistant (MA) asks the patient to write down two or three things, and I address those first and try to satisfy those needs by the end of the visit.
2. **Acknowledge the patient within five minutes of being placed in a room.** As soon as my MA has the patient in a room, she texts me. Usually, I can break away from what I'm doing. I will greet patients, ask if I can get them anything, and tell them I'll be with them shortly. It's like being in a restaurant. You're a lot happier with the waitress who brings you water and some bread while you are waiting, even if she doesn't come back immediately to take your order.
3. **Explain delays.**
4. **Show the patient his or her electronic chart right on the computer.** I tell patients, "I like this because we can read everything and it makes your care safe — and here's how you can gain access to it."
5. **At the end of a visit, ask, "Is there anything else I can help you with today?"**
6. **Finally, give positive reassurance: "Thanks for coming today. You're doing well. I look forward to seeing you next time."**

Finding the Right Touch

"With these changes, my patient satisfaction scores came up, but I wanted them to be even higher," says Dr. Hallett. "I saw a study that says patients like it when the doctor knocks on the door before entering. I use the hand sanitizer outside the door and let patients see me cleaning my hands as I enter," he adds.

"I considered what else I could do, and my wife asked, 'At the end of a visit, do you ever give patients a hug? Why don't you ask if they'd like a healing hug — a one-armed Charleston hug? I think you'll be surprised how many people want a hug.'"

Dr. Hallett accepted the wisdom of this advice. He also offers hugs to caregivers who are struggling to take care of loved ones daily. He gives bear hugs to fellow veterans and thanks them for their service.

He's a strong believer that people want the healing power of touch from their doctor but often don't get it.

"With these changes, my scores went up over the 90th percentile and even to 100 by the end of 2014," he says.

It's a Team Effort

Roper Vascular Care faces challenges in caring for patients with chronic vascular disease. Many are there because of smoking, obesity, and noncompliance with prescribed care. The doctors and staff often have to persuade people to make changes that are difficult to make.

Gaining excellent ratings under these circumstances requires tough analysis of every staff member's interaction with the patient. Research and close observation uncover "drivers" that require change or special attention. Improving those specific encounters that drive patients' perceptions will lift how they rate the overall experience.

"PRC's ratings and Key Drivers of Excellence® have been the foundation for our realization that excellent patient satisfaction is a structured quality improvement process that the entire practice team must embrace," Dr. Hallett says.

Dr. Hallett readily acknowledges that no matter how many changes he makes, he won't get excellent ratings unless the staff around him is excellent as well.

"Patients will rate me down if my MA or receptionist is rude," he says.

To review upcoming patient visits, analyze office processes and discuss ways to improve care, staff at Roper Vascular Care meet weekly. They also work with the director of the Vascular Lab at Roper, which performs vascular testing adjacent to the office.

When PRC's telephone surveys identify factors that dissatisfy patients, the practice works to improve problems that influence patients' perceptions of their visit. The team gives serious attention to issues with registration or the wait for valet parking, along with efforts to be punctual and answer patients' questions fully.

Sharing a Story of Failure and Success with Fellow Physicians

Dr. Hallett's career as a vascular surgeon spans more than 30 years. He spent 20 years practicing with the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. He has worked at Eastern Maine Medical Center and served as Chief Medical Officer for Roper St. Francis Healthcare in Charleston, South Carolina, for five years. Currently, he serves as Chief Innovation Officer for Roper St. Francis.

He embraces the nonprofit healthcare system's mission of healing all people with compassion, faith, and excellence.

"We are dedicated to putting the needs of the patient first. We understand the importance of the patient experience," he emphasizes.

"It took me a few years to realize that I may be an excellent doctor, but I need to be concerned that every patient walks away feeling satisfied. The most difficult part for me was accepting that those low scores reflected how patients felt about me. I needed to embrace that failure and decide to play every point," Dr. Hallett says.

"As a physician leader, I've had to stand up and tell other physicians my story of failure. This is what I've done to change, and here's how it has worked.

"I want to be excellent, but I'm imperfect. I want people around me to tell me what they observe — and to accept what they tell me," he says.

"I want patients who come to see me to leave satisfied, feeling that I met their expectations on every level."

Dr. Hallett applauds Roper's dedication to sharing PRC research data with physicians and other medical providers to improve patient care.

The healthcare system also promotes widely accepted communication tools to help staff members communicate effectively with patients and families.

"At Roper Vascular Care, we love our patients and love coming to work. Our health system is known for being patient-centered versus profit-driven," he notes.

Dr. Hallett is proud of his personal journey and the changes it has brought to his own and his patients' experience.

"It feels good to be at the top. It motivates me to continue to try to stay there. If people rate your service as excellent, there's a good chance they'll come back."

About PRC

Professional Research Consultants, Inc., (PRC) brings excellence to healthcare through custom market research. It remains the largest privately held market research and performance improvement firm dedicated solely to the healthcare industry. In addition to being a certified vendor for government-mandated CAHPS surveys, PRC also provides custom research services that measure community perceptions, brand positions, patient experience, physician alignment, and employee engagement. PRC also conducts community health needs assessments in accordance with IRS guidelines. PRC was founded in 1980 and is headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska.



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