



## When perception and reality intersect

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Barbara's expertise is HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY with a focus on Healthcare. A lot of the information presented to patients is not remembered, understood or complied to. Barbara's life's passion is to help patients navigate and comprehend the healthcare world so they are not so frightened and upset by the mere process.

Barbara worked with Smart Source to create a series of products and services whose primary function is to educate and communicate to the patients. Visit our website at [www.hand-holder.com](http://www.hand-holder.com) and see how we meet this challenge. Then send us your comments and ideas so you too can help take care of everyone and feel good about your life every day!

When perception and reality intersect, the result is improvement. Work is needed to ensure perception and reality are in alignment. For example, consider the VA Hospital Network which has experienced negative reviews. There are significant benefits to the VA Hospital Network and this perception needs to intersect with reality before the network can improve. The other day I overheard someone speaking poorly to a group of people about the VA hospitals because a friend of his had died while under care at our local campus.

Other began citing their own negative commentary about VA hospitals. The interesting part of the group discuss on the VA Hospital shortcomings is there is strong evidence to support the contrary. My personal experience with patients at this hospital is that the care is OUTSTANDING. In fact my brother-in-law, suffering from severe spinal stenosis, had remarkably better care at the VA than the private specialists and hospitals. The VA performed an 11 hour surgery with 7



doctors on hand. They literally moved the nerves that had fused to his spine one by one enabling him to stand up straight again, and walk without pain. And my brother has had repeated excellent experiences with surgeries, eye care and health maintenance. At the moment, VA hospitals have been suffering with a continual barrage of unpleasant media stories about terrible healthcare experiences and deaths as the result of an over-stressed system that is trying to update processes and procedures. While they have a captive audience, it is also true that they suffer from the same financial struggles private hospitals suffer from- only with a spotlight on performance, while funding remains a struggle.

The imagery and perception created by the community but fueled by the media cannot change quickly enough to acknowledge the improvements happening behind the scenes in VA hospitals across the country. Implementing new technologies and changing the process flow inside a hospital- all while continuing to provide health services to thousands of patients- is an arduous task and does not happen overnight. But the public is impatient, and the media even more so

FIX THIS NOW! is the battle cry heard across the country.

There seems to be little patience for the understanding that all the changes needed require time and money- both of which seem to be in short supply when it is YOUR loved one who needs help. But the automation of routine tasks is happening rapidly and the changes are evolving, even as the pressure and perceptions lag behind the reality of improvements.

One of the things that can happen that can radically change market perception is the introduction of constant, continual, clear COMMUNICATIONS.

The media needs to understand that improvements are happening and technology solutions are forthcoming, and process changes are being implemented, some of the pressure will abate and the perceptions and reality will start to align. But we are not talking about a few spiffy newsletters, or even TV appearances. We are talking about personalized, comprehensible communications that are relevant to each patient's care and specific to each doctor's instructions. We are talking about clear, concise communications to each patient that they can easily access and understand. We are talking about reaching out to Veterans in the way they want to communicate, with very specific information regarding their healthcare relationship with their hospital and their care providers. In plain language they want to know; where exactly they need to go, precisely when they need to be there, what they need to bring with them, and most importantly, how exactly they need to prepare for the appointment, as well as what to expect when they get there.

The primary benefits integrated patient communications will afford to the VA system is a reduction in wait times, properly prepared patients who understand the expectations, and a smoother patient flow. Educated and informed patients are satisfied patients. Satisfied patients can change market perceptions, even as the seemingly slow moving improvements are being implemented. Studies have shown that the single biggest complaint patients have is that they do not feel adequately communicated with, and a phone call is not enough. Pushing information to them instead of expecting them to initiate the communication is what is needed. Proactively instead of reactively supplying them what they need and want can radically impact the relationship as well as unburden staff so they have more time for care-giving, and even perhaps, for helping to implement the sorely needed process changes that will prevent our vets from slipping through the cracks of our over-burdened health system! We need to give back to the people who gave so much for us.. our U.S.A. Veterans!

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