

Private HealthCare – CASE STUDY

“At last our company has found a sustainable system and process for capturing, reporting and taking action to improve Patient Care”.

- Mike Flemming, Managing Director

The Challenge Afrox Healthcare Limited faced before using the Customer Feedback System

Afrox Healthcare Limited had always attempted to measure the satisfaction of patients through the use of complex surveys. These surveys however, were time consuming and complex. Data capturing was a difficult process and by the time results were available they were inadequate and outdated. Questionnaires also changed from one hospital to the next, which meant that it was impossible for hospitals or group levels to benchmark against one another. Continuous Improvement, which is a cornerstone of their TQM process, was difficult to monitor. This necessitated the entrance of Customer Feedback Systems.

Afrox Healthcare Limited’s Key Business Objectives

- Enhancement of quality as a focus area
- Elevation of nursing standards
- Provision of world-class patient care
- Quest for the maintenance of world-class quality standards at all its hospital facilities - for the benefit of patients, employees, supporting medical practitioners and funders
- Commitment towards the process of Total Quality Management (TQM)

How the Customer Feedback System helps Afrox Healthcare Limited to deliver Quality Care to its Patients

“Afrox Healthcare Limited is committed to quality patient care. Quality measures are used to benchmark the performance of each unit and all hospitals, as part of performance management outputs. Customer feedback has always been a priority for Afrox Healthcare Limited. In the past, various attempts were made to standardise feedback from patients and great effort was put into hospital specific and group questionnaires. The systems were complex & mainly driven manually. Benchmarking was not possible due to hospital specific measures. Afrox Healthcare Limited standardised on the CFS system in 2002 for high level benchmarking and implemented the system in all the main hospitals within a six-month period. The system allows for daily online report availability. Regional and group reports can be generated for benchmarking purposes. The Nursing function has integrated the Patient Satisfaction Feedback System with the Quality leg of the nursing framework - it is used as the measure for patient satisfaction.”

Nursing Information Support Specialist



Description of the Customer Feedback System

The Customer Feedback Systems is currently installed in 42 hospitals throughout South Africa, with a total of 452 devices being used. These consist of 70% portable devices and 30% fixed devices. The devices form part of a nursing intervention that is aimed at improving patient care in all areas of the hospitals. The devices are placed in Wards, Specialised Units, Outpatient Units, Theatres and Reception areas. Afrox Healthcare Limited is planning to install the Customer Feedback System in all its hospitals.

How the customer feedback devices are used in the hospitals...

In the wards...

Patients answer the questions at their bedside, before being discharged.

At reception...

Patients answer the questions while the person admitting them is processing their documentation.

In the Specialised Units...

Patients or family members answer the questions when prompted by the nursing staff.

Getting back to patients that complain...

Comments cards are available for patients who want to complain or make compliment in writing. The cards have place for comments as well as patient contact details. The cards are collected & actioned by the Ward/Unit Managers.

Each Ward or Unit has an A1 poster that is updated weekly by the Ward/Unit Manager. At the weekly feedback meeting, results are discussed, trends are communicated & staff suggest action plans for improving/maintaining patient satisfaction. As a result, staff are constantly aware of the key issues affecting patient satisfaction and also feel like they are included in the process.

How the Customer Feedback System has been integrated into Afrox Healthcare Limited's Nursing Framework

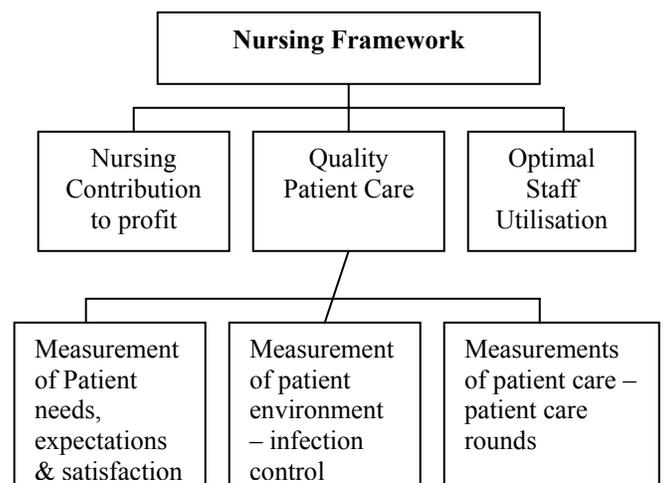
Afrox Healthcare Limited has created a Nursing Framework for developing, implementing & sustaining qualitative & quantitative integrated standards & measures for the entire nursing function.

The Nursing Framework has three main focus areas, namely:

- Nursing Contribution to Profit
- Optimal Staff Utilisation
- Quality Patient Care

Quality Patient Care is assessed in three main ways, namely:

- By measuring patient needs, expectations & satisfaction – using the Customer Feedback Devices
- By measuring the patient environment with an emphasis on infection control
- By measuring patient care – via qualitative surveys conducted randomly in each Ward/specialised unit (Nursing Care Plan)



Business Benefits...

The advantages of the Customer Feedback System were immense and significant benefits were immediately experienced. CFS became a core measure for patient care. CFS is user-friendly and easy to use as well as ensuring a long term cost reduction. No data capturing is required, which means that real time results are available. Because standardised questions exist at different hospitals, Afrox is able to create a benchmark for patient care. CFS offers the flexibility to be able to expand into numerous functional areas. Currently the functional areas where the CFS is implemented are Wards, Specialised Units, Outpatient Units, Theatres and Reception. The CFS provides insight into training needs and has the ability to recognise outstanding performances, which improves morale. Finally CFS offers vital information to be able to make informed strategic management decisions.

“Our future growth in Healthcare will emanate from low cost models providing basic quality care to the uninsured, and from products such as our computer based patient care and productivity programmes, our eHealth initiatives, as well as from investment opportunities,”

- Mike Flemming, Managing Director of Afrox Healthcare Limited

“Patient Satisfaction at the Touch of a Button”

Patients at Durban’s hospitals complain more about cold, unappetising meals than they do about nursing care. And after food, noisy nurses’ shoes and squeaky trolleys top the list of patient irritations. Now the hospitals’ state-of-the-art electronic questionnaire – introduced last year at all six of Afrox’s hospitals in KwaZulu-Natal – will be tweaked to elevate nursing standards. A separate, independent food questionnaire designed by the hospitals’ catering company will soon be circulated exclusively exploring taste, temperature, presentation and service. “We have learned that patients expect five-star cuisine from our hospitals and this is why our catering company will introduce a specific food questionnaire to evaluate food needs,” said Sharon Reinecke, nursing service manager at Westville Hospital. Westville was the first hospital to use the digital questionnaires. The portable e-questionnaires – since rolled out to Chatsmed Garden Hospital, Mount Edgecombe, Crompton and Empangeni Garden Clinic – are filled out on touch-sensitive, hand-held computers brought directly to patients’ beds. The patients views are then routed to a desktop computer, printed out, and relayed immediately to hospital management. The interactive system was introduced to provide an immediate indication of problem areas, allowing for a speedy, same-day response.

“It’s proved to be a wonderful tool. It’s given us a good gut feel about the general attitude of patients to our hospital,” said Reinecke.

(Article taken from “Focus”, May 2003)

In summary, the Customer Feedback System has benefited Afrox Healthcare Limited in the following ways...

More than 80% of patients staying in Afrox Healthcare Limited hospitals answer the questions on the feedback devices. As a result...

- Decision makers are constantly in touch with patient satisfaction level information
- A culture has been created where patient care is “top of mind”
- Patients have an opportunity to express themselves about the nursing care they have received
- Wards/Units can be held accountable for patient satisfaction levels
- Information is available on a daily/weekly/monthly basis
- Staff accept the system because they are involved in the process generating action plans for improving patient care
- Patient satisfaction levels are tracked & compared across units, hospitals & regions within Afrox Healthcare Limited
- By changing the questions, Afrox Healthcare Limited has received feedback from patients on several important issues
- The cost per response is very low, making the system a cost effective means of gathering quantitative data
- Administration costs & time delays that are associated with a manual data gathering process have been eliminated

Lessons Learned...

- Improvements in patient satisfaction levels must be driven in the wards/units, through the communication of weekly information and the generating action plans.
- Ward/Unit Managers must drive the process and all staff must be included.
- Devices in reception & pre-admission areas must be positioned at patient contact points, where patients have a “moment in time” to give their feedback
- Ward nursing staff must take the devices to patients at their beds, before they are discharged, and prompt them to give their feedback.
- There is a strong correlation between the number of responses a ward/unit gets from patients and its “patient satisfaction score”. Low volumes are generally an indication of low buy-in from the ward/unit nursing staff.
- Take the time to train staff. They need to understand that the system is a tool for them to use to do their jobs better – the focus should be cast on the value of the patients opinion, rather than on how good or bad the staff are. Threatened staff avoid negative feedback from patients by not asking them to answer the questions on the devices.
- Questions need to be changed regularly – possibly every 6 to 12 months.
- The customer feedback devices should be seen and used as a “tactical” tool for getting feedback from patients and then reacting quickly to improve the situation.
- To be effective, the system must be integrated into existing business practices
- Wards/Units and Hospitals need to be held accountable for improving patient satisfaction levels