

## **Fostering an enduring service culture in a rural hospital setting**

Located near several major cities, Duncan Regional Hospital faces significant competition from larger, big-city hospitals. Coupled with Oklahoma being one of the lowest-paid states in the Medicare system, Duncan faced considerable challenges in achieving — and sustaining — operational and financial success.

The hospital had a longstanding tradition of providing personalized service. In 1997, the hospital's 600 team members embarked on a quest to deliver the best possible service to patients and visitors.

To do that, the management team sought out effective models in service excellence.

That led Duncan to Disney Institute, where the management team learned the principles and practices that have reaped nearly three decades of success.

Duncan's tradition of Guest service was documented by Press, Ganey, the well-known survey firm. Surveys indicated that in-patient satisfaction ratings were consistently above the 95th percentile when measured against other facilities. But Duncan CEO David Robertson wanted to do even better.

Says Robertson, "We wanted to compare ourselves against a world-class benchmark." As it turned out, that yardstick was not to be found within the healthcare industry. "Healthcare is not the industry in which we would choose to compare ourselves. It isn't doing as good a job as other industries."

A team was sent to Disney Institute to study its offerings and make a recommendation to the Board of Directors on a course of action. The cross-functional leadership team participated in a three-and-one-half-day "Disney Approach" seminar. The team returned home with the recommendation that Disney Institute offered a solid platform on which to build an even higher level of satisfaction and service culture. It recommended that the entire management team of 60 people go through the initial program as a way of accelerating

and solidifying the implementation process. Although this was a significant expenditure for a hospital strapped from a reimbursement standpoint, the hospital carried forward the recommendation.

"A significant highlight of the Disney experience is field experiences, where you actually go into backstage areas of the parks and resorts to see Disney philosophies and practices in action," continues Robertson. "The advantage of sending our entire management team to Disney Institute was that it helped us speak a common language and have a common experience base."

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"When something comes up, we can say things like, 'It's time we bumped the lamp,' or 'Remember the backstage area at the Wilderness Lodge?' You have a core group of people who have bought into the change. There has to be a critical mass that begins the process of change; we developed that critical mass at one moment in time. And that helped us implement a number of things more rapidly," says Robertson.

With Disney strategies for people management and Guest service in hand, the entire Duncan Regional Hospital management team returned home prepared to initiate change. "Traditionally, hospitals talk about how to improve things for the management, the physicians, and the staff. Looking at the Disney approach, we knew we needed to improve things for the patients. This would achieve an economy of cost, improved satisfaction and morale, and many other benefits.

The program was rolled out to everyone — the board, the medical staff, the volunteers and most importantly, the physician office staff. Says Robertson, "Physician office staffers are of pivotal importance, because they see things from the patient's perspective more than anyone. If there's a bottleneck in the system, they're in the best position to remedy the situation."

Working together with team members in all departments and in various roles, Duncan selected as its service theme, “Personalized Care and Service with a Commitment to Excellence.” With that vision in mind, the team created specific standards for service and achieved buy-in from the 600-employee staff within the organization. Much of the success of the program ultimately stemmed from active involvement from the front-line team members. With their feedback and input, changes were implemented to ensure that everyone felt welcomed and valued.

For example, team members said that the Human Resources area was too public, so the office was moved to a more private area. In another case, to ensure that new team members understood the hospital’s service commitment, the orientation program was revised to include the service theme and service standards. “We have a very specific dress code, because we believe that personal appearance is very important in communicating professionalism,” says Robertson. Now team members learn about appearance standards and other issues in a welcome video. The orientation program includes hands-on training, interaction with current team members, hospital tours, and a “service theme pledge book.” Taking this commitment step

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one step further, now team members have pins identifying them as having memorized the service theme and service standards.

**Results:**

Duncan Regional Hospital has netted enormous benefit from adapting Disney standards. There has been a jump in market share from 58 percent to 64 percent — impressive by any hospital standards. The hospital has made a strong leap in patient satisfaction. According to independent Press, Ganey patient satisfaction tools, Emergency Department scores alone have skyrocketed to a recent 99th percentile, moving from a relatively low 75th percentile rating.

Concludes Robertson, “We have been developing our new Guest services culture for several years now, and we must constantly remind ourselves that we need to grow and change to reflect the evolving needs of our Guests. We realize that we’re a work in progress; we don’t ever want to become complacent and comfortable with our successes.”

To learn more about how Disney Institute can assist your organization on its own journey to excellence, call **407-566-1738** or visit **[www.disneyinstitute.com](http://www.disneyinstitute.com)**.

