

# Raising the bar

## Avera McKennan strives for a higher standard in Service Excellence

BY DONNA FARRIS, AVERA MCKENNAN WRITER/EDITOR

Without excellent service, even care of the highest clinical quality may not be enough to create loyalty in the hearts and minds of patients and their families.

“We want our customers to think of us as the best,” said Bill McLean, senior vice president for human resources at Avera McKennan. That’s why Service Excellence is one of two major hospital-wide initiatives at Avera McKennan Hospital & University Health Center, involving all staff – from physicians, to nurses, to housekeepers, to valets, to maintenance staff, to meal tray passers.

The Service Excellence Initiative has been in action since 2005 and McLean said signs are many that this initiative is making significant progress. “Good is the enemy of great,” said McLean, quoting author Jim Collins. “We’re good, but we want to be great. That’s where our biggest challenge lies.”

These days, it’s not unusual to hear from patients who say they received good care years ago at Avera McKennan, but that their latest stay was a totally different experience, with staff who are friendly, helpful and willing to go out of their way.

### Excellent service, every time

“Is there room for improvement? Yes,” McLean said. Service Excellence won’t be achieved until every staff member provides excellent service, every time.

An example of success is the “lost customer.” It’s been emphasized among Avera McKennan employees to

make eye contact, greet others in passing and offer assistance when someone appears to be “lost.”

This has become second nature, evidenced by a number of comments praising the helpfulness of all Avera McKennan employees, said Mary Sand, Avera McKennan director of service and organizational development. “It’s now so consistent

that we get many compliments about this. Everybody seems to be on board that this is the way we do things.”

Sand and McLean would like to see that same phenomenon happen with all aspects of customer service – such as clearly communicating to patients what to expect in terms of wait times, or eliminating personal conversations within earshot of patients.

### Top in Service Excellence

The following departments have achieved the goal of the 90th percentile for five or more months since November 2005:

Emergency Room	17 months
Rehab (2 East)	15 months
Women’s Center	13 months
Behavioral Health Center – Children’s	13 months
Pediatrics	9 months
Behavioral Health Center – Senior	10 months
Home Care	7 months
3 East	7 months
Avera Prince of Peace	7 months
NICU	5 months

### The Voice of our Patients:

*“I had an amazing doctor who really cared.” – Emergency Department*

*“This is the best hospital I have ever been to. All the nurses and the rest of the workers I have met here are awesome. Thanks for everything.” – Rehab*

*“How very fortunate we have been to have the opportunity to be in rehab at Avera. Everyone has been helpful and caring. We thank all of you and we will never forget your kindness.” – Rehab*

*“The nurses were incredible! They LOVE their job as it was evident in their concern for patients. THANK YOU!” – Women’s Center*

*“When compared to other hospitals, I would recommend Avera McKennan to everyone. It’s more personable and friendly and you don’t feel like another number to them.” – Women’s Center*

*“Avera McKennan is THE best hospital. I would refer anyone to make Avera their first and only choice.” – Women’s Center.”*

The Service Excellence initiative emphasizes specific ways of speaking and acting with customers, based on Avera's four CARE standards of Communication, Attitude, Responsiveness and Engagement. The initiative is set up on a team structure of 17 local and regional teams. Employees are reached with Service Excellence messages through the Daily Line-up in each department, quarterly forums, iCARE seminars, communication boards in central locations throughout the hospital and new employee orientation. Service Excellence is an initiative not only at Avera McKennan, but throughout the Avera system. Features include scripting of consistent messages and body language for customer interaction; service recovery; leader rounding; leadership development; and expressing appreciation for employees, leaders, physicians, patients and others.

### The trek to 'very good'

For many years, as Avera McKennan received customer feedback through Parkside Survey, scores were good. When Parkside was purchased by Press Ganey, however, that placed Avera McKennan in a much bigger database of hospitals, and scores dropped. "Our scores were not terrible, but it doesn't take but a fraction of a point less to drop many percentage points," McLean said. Scores can only soar to the 90th percentile when patients consistently give the highest score of "very good."

Avera McKennan opted to contract with Baptist Leadership Institute, a project of Baptist Health Care of Pensacola, Fla. After experiencing low scores, Baptist Health Care began a tremendous focus on patient satisfaction, and has been at the 99th percentile for nearly 10 years as a

leading hospital in patient satisfaction.

"They don't have a fancy playbook, but they execute every play correctly every time. It's an expectation of every person on that team," McLean said of Baptist Health Care.

In 2005, Avera McKennan set a goal to be in the 90th percentile in overall Press Ganey scores by July 2007. While that did not occur as hoped, scores have moved in a positive direction.

In December 2004, Avera McKennan's overall score was the 32nd percentile. In July 2007, the overall score was 71 percent. Although monthly highs are not as consistent as leaders would like them to be, they are higher on an overall basis. "We care about scores only as a reflection of what our customers are thinking of us," McLean said.

## Excellent service makes the difference in clinic care



Patients naturally assume that all doctors give great care. What makes the difference in patient loyalty is how they are treated – on the phone, in the clinic lobby, or in the exam room, said Mark Vortherms, Avera McKennan regional administrator of network operations.

According to the 2007 Sullivan/Luallin customer satisfaction surveys completed at 67 Avera clinic sites,

patients are more satisfied with their care at clinics than a year ago. In 2007, clinics collectively ranked at the 75.4th percentile in a national database.

All 37 questions received higher scores than the 2006 survey. Ten clinics ranked at or above the 90th percentile, and 26 clinics improved their score or remained the same.

In comparison, in 2006 clinics ranked at the 68.7th percentile, with seven clinics at or above the 90th percentile.

Service Excellence can be challenging, because it involves meeting expectations which differ from person to person.

Clinic Service Excellence teams have worked with staff as well as physicians. Physicians receive tips and techniques on ways to improve patient satisfaction. Shadowing by a consultant is offered to physicians who are below the 50th percentile, and all physicians are offered a telephone consult.

Training and consultations with physicians are paying dividends. In 2007, 24 physicians and 18 mid-level providers reached the 90th percentile. Also in 2007, only three physicians fell below the 25th percentile, compared to 27 in 2006.

It's noteworthy that nearly all patients – 98.7 percent – stated that they would definitely or probably recommend the provider they saw to others.

"Service Excellence is compatible with the mission of our organization, and overall is the right thing to do," Vortherms said. "Also, outcome data shows that satisfied patients have better outcomes, because they're more compliant with their treatment plan."

While Avera McKennan has not yet achieved the 90th percentile, the hospital is staying on track with the Service Excellence Initiative based on success seen so far. A number of individual departments have reached the 90th percentile, and are staying there, such as the Emergency Department, Rehabilitation and Women's Center, for example.

### Recovering patient loyalty

One emphasis within the Service Excellence Initiative is Service Recovery – which is what takes place after a service failure happens.

“If you're striving for service excellence and you don't meet that mark for whatever reason, there's still an opportunity to hold on to that customer,” said Lori Popkes, director of Women's and Children's Services at Avera McKennan, and leader of the Patient Satisfaction team. “Studies show you can develop an even more loyal customer if you do service recovery well.”

Service recovery begins with a blameless apology that does not point fingers. Other aspects may include compensating customers in some way for their trouble, for example, a gas gift card if they have to make an extra trip due to a service failure.

Customer complaints and service recovery efforts are tracked in order to find ways to prevent service failures in the first place. Wait times, pain management and noise levels continue to be areas of challenge, Popkes said.

Concerning wait times, staff are being trained to clearly communicate expected wait times, and to explain why a wait may seem excessive. At the same time, LEAN projects are aimed at streamlining processes in order to reduce waiting. To better manage pain, staff from anesthesia, psychiatry, nursing

and pharmacy have teamed up to set new protocols, piloting a project in the orthopedics unit. And to curb noise, solutions as simple as rubber stoppers on large file drawers are being installed.

### 'It's the right thing to do'

Service Excellence is vital in carrying out the Avera mission to improve the lives and health of those that we serve, Sand said. “We can have great clinical outcomes, which we do. But if the patient didn't feel cared for as an individual, or didn't feel we were friendly and personable, their experience wasn't all that we could have made it to be.”

“We want to create a mindset in our workforce to treat every patient as we

would treat our parents, our brother or sister, our child or our best friend, every time. It's the right thing to do,” McLean said.

Patients may not always understand quality indicators or outcomes, but they do understand whether or not they were treated with compassion and dignity. “Great care involves both high quality and good service. So when people leave, they know they feel better, but they also feel they were well taken care of.” McLean said.

In today's health care market, there are choices. “We want to be at a point where our patients don't even think about going anywhere else for their health care,” McLean said.

## Avera McKennan: 'A winning team'



Throughout his year-long treatment for a brain tumor, Roger Koole of Sioux Falls and his wife, Karen, have found Avera McKennan physicians, nurses and staff to be not only excellent caregivers, but hope-givers as well.

“At the time of my husband's surgery, our nurse gave us such loving tender care, always with a smile. But most of all she

gave us hope,” Karen Koole said. “With each of our visits to the cancer floor, all the nurses and staff have been there to calm our anxieties, always asking ‘Can we do anything else for you?’ – or even giving a hug.”

Because Roger, an accountant, is a skilled computer user, the Kooles' one wish was for Internet access at Avera McKennan. How pleased they were when Roger came in for additional treatment in July to find that Avera McKennan had added free wireless Internet. Roger's family set him up with instant messaging, so each day, Karen could write her husband an early morning “hello” and a good-night message.

“Each worker or volunteer who is part of Avera McKennan is part of the best team in the world – a team with the most homeruns, the most goals, the most touchdowns, the most baskets and the most points,” Karen said. “Avera McKennan is a winning hospital.”

## Emergency Department leads in customer service scores



Lisa Lindgren, nurse manager of Avera McKennan's Emergency Department, believes it's her stellar staff – not herself – who deserves credit for consistently high customer satisfaction scores.

Yet Lindgren leads a department that progressed from Press Ganey Survey scores in the 60th percentile to the 90th percentile and above during her tenure as manager. And since the Service Excellence initiative began in November 2005, the Emergency Department has been above the 90th percentile for 17 months, as of August 2007.

“My staff are the front-line people who make it happen every day,” Lindgren said. The way they make it happen is by following through on LEAN principles implemented in the department, and adhering to Avera's Service Excellence standards of Communication, Attitude, Responsiveness and Engagement.

A LEAN implementation in the ED succeeded in trimming patient length of stay by 25 minutes, to an average of 1 hour and 54 minutes. “Patient satisfaction is a challenge for us, because emergency room visits are always unplanned,” Lindgren said. “What makes patients the happiest is to get in and out as quickly as possible.”

The LEAN team found ways for patients to see a physician right away, through quick assessments upon arrival by a triage nurse, and doing bedside registration after care has begun. Extra measures to protect patients' privacy have also boosted patient satisfaction.

Lindgren said her team is well prepared to move into their newly constructed, state-of-the-art 20-room ED at Avera McKennan, knowing that they're working as efficiently and effectively as possible to provide top-quality care.

## On the menu – new restaurant-style choices



Hospital food.

Because today's hospitals have stepped up to the challenge of meeting consumer demand, the term no longer carries with it a connotation of mediocrity and blandness.

And at Avera McKennan, members of a Food Champion Committee are hoping patients will equate their food experience to a quality restaurant or hotel room service, with a new menu rollout this fall.

Avera McKennan Executive Chef Paul Luttmann said the hospital's computer conversion for Electronic Medical Records afforded the possibility to switch to a “restaurant style” menu, instead of having two complete menus to choose from for each meal.

The menu will be the same every day, with multiple choices in each category, including meal starters, entrees, side dishes, desserts and beverages. With up to 16 choices in every category, patients may mix and match as they desire.

For breakfast, they may choose ham and Swiss quiche, a blueberry muffin and seasonal fruit. For lunch, a garden salad, salmon with sauce and rice pilaf. And for dinner? Filet Mignon, au gratin potatoes, broccoli florets and New York cheesecake for dessert.

Included on the menu are new choices, such as a breakfast burrito, roast pork loin, meat lasagna, three-layer chocolate cake and broccoli cheese soup. Luttmann, an award-winning chef, said he added menu items he knew would be popular, and also asked tray passers to bring back direct feedback from patients. Items like beef pot roast and tater tot casserole were added as “comfort foods.”

Meanwhile, revamping the cafeteria menu is a work in progress.

“Very few departments are in touch with every single patient three times a day,” Luttmann said. In the complexity of health care where doctors and nurses are in control, the menu is one area which patients understand, and where they have the final say, if their health allows.

Avera McKennan's food service prepares an average of 750 patient meals per day. A rating of “very good” on patient satisfaction surveys is the goal and focus of this new menu rollout.

“As the public becomes more food savvy, it's more important to give them the type of service they would receive elsewhere,” Luttmann said. “We wouldn't want to be known for the best health care, but the worst food. It's the total package that we offer the patient.”

MKTG101SE07

“AS THE PUBLIC BECOMES MORE FOOD SAVVY, IT'S MORE IMPORTANT TO GIVE THEM THE TYPE OF SERVICE THEY WOULD RECEIVE ELSEWHERE.” – PAUL LUTTMANN, AVERA MCKENNAN EXECUTIVE CHEF