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## How can we focus on our bright spots?

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to becoming an organization that consistently provides patients great stories to tell. As the authors of [The Power of Positive Deviance: How Unlikely Innovators Solve the World's Toughest Problems](#) (2010) write, "Discoveries from one community cannot be repackaged and provided to another as a silver bullet" (Pascale, Sternin, Sternin, p. 112).

Executing the best strategy to improve our patients' experiences requires us to start from within. This does not mean we can discount successful strategies others have used. No matter the source, there are plenty of process lessons we can learn from others. The best lessons, however, are often found within the walls of our organizations. The "positive deviance" approach to problem solving asks, "What are we doing RIGHT?" and "How can we replicate success?" It is a communal approach to improvement that employs open discussion, critical thinking, and creativity.

Uncovering our bright spots and analyzing our specific situation is a rigorous process, but with great payoff. When we choose to learn from our positive deviants - those people and units showing great success - we equip our employees with messages of motivation. *We have* created excellent patient experiences. *We can* create more excellent patient experiences. We are quick to turn to consulting companies, national conferences, and world-renowned hospitals for guidance, bypassing the teachable moments in our institutions. Often, we already hold the keys to excellence. We simply have to find them. When it comes to problem solving, begin by looking within.

Proust advises us, "We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one can make for us, which no one else can spare us." In the spirit of self-discovery, some questions follow to guide discussions and uncover bright spots worth replicating.

### What is the problem we are trying to overcome?

How many of our patients rate their quality of care as "Excellent?" How many say "Very Good?" How many say "Good?" When we peel the onion to our patient perception data, we find the biggest problem we have in our organizations is that too many patients *like* us and not enough *love* us. The problem we are trying to overcome is not dissatisfaction, but mere satisfaction. We don't want patients to be simply "satisfied" or "ok" with their care, we want patients to believe they had excellent care. We want patients to leave our institutions with stories to tell of our caring staff, impeccable teamwork, and consistent communication.



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## Who has overcome this problem? How?

Every unit has obstacles: tight budgets, turnover, low volume, high volume, old facilities, cramped quarters, etc. Yet in every hospital, some units overcome these obstacles to provide consistently compassionate care that connects with patients. Our goal is to uncover these high performers - these positive deviants - and to study what it is they do differently from those struggling to be a high performer. What do they do for patients that they don't *have* to do? What do they do that *exceeds* patients' expectations? Answers to these and similar questions can light our unique path to excellence.

## When patients pay us compliments, what aspects of care do they recognize?

To tackle the problem of increasing the patients who are *impressed* with our care and service, we have to investigate how impressive experiences look and feel. What "wows" patients may differ from what we might guess – patients and caregivers approach care from a distinctly different perspective. Reading patient letters and listening to PRC Voices® is a great place to start when trying to figure out what is behind a positive experience worth talking about (e.g., timeliness, ease of scheduling, bubbly technician, etc.). Most units, departments, and hospitals do a decent job of sharing positive comments from patients. Take it a step beyond sharing and recognition and use these comments as an opportunity to ask more questions: What was distinct about this patient's care that triggered a positive response? How can we deliver more experiences like this?

## What are our best shifts/days/weeks like?

We've all had bad days, good days, and great days. The positive deviance approach seeks to find what's behind the great days. How do these great days begin? How do they end? Who is working? What qualities do they possess? How do we instill processes that make these great days the rule and not the exception? We all have unique strengths, and by exploring them we can create innovative ways to improve the patient experience.

Source: Pascale, R., Sternin, J., & Sternin, M. (2010). *The power of positive deviance*. Boston: Harvard Business Press.

