

Patients are only human, after all.

June 2, 2011

See you!

"See you...never again!" I said to the doctor when I left the hospital last year after some minor surgery. That sums up the dilemma of hospitals, clinics, health care providers: they offer services that no one really wants to buy. And yet we do it, massively and increasingly. No one who is thinking about not going to the hospital if his condition requires so. There is no alternative, right?

True, but what hospital do you go? The nearest, just for that reason? Or to the hospital to which your GP has referred you? All possible but clever patients these days go to the hospital - and the associated physicians - with the best medical reputation. Is not it? To discuss about this topic and more, the Vlerick Healthcare Management Day last Wednesday, June 1 was the perfect opportunity. Theme this year: "Brand Management: Brand value and new media in the healthcare sector."

Knowing me, knowing you

Can hospitals assume that in times of increasing market competition they still will see this continuous flow of patients coming their way? Patients these days are indeed much better informed and empowered before they end up in the surgery.

In our country, there are very few healthcare organizations these days that employ a marketer. Yet, they have everything from a large commercial organization with hundreds of employees and countless moments of contact with the customer, patient or visitor. Moreover, they know their customers literally inside and out. This makes them well placed to use that position and build a privileged relationship with their customers. And offer them a patient experience that leaves no doubt as to where the patient will want to be treated next time. But there's a long way to go: especially for the physicians among the participants it remains difficult to accept that anything else but the medical intervention quality will determine patient satisfaction. Medical treatment or care is the core business and yes reception, friendliness of care, waiting times for examination, complete and timely information about the treatment, the cleanliness of the rooms, taste and choice of the menu is important but their impact deflates once the successfully treated patient leaves the hospital, right? Hmm ... raise your hand if you are still convinced that "How do you like the food here?" is not the most asked question by hospital visitors.

Call for change

Not that the participants in the Health Care Management Day are not convinced that there is room for change. They do, but how do they convince the management that resources (dollars and people) are instrumental to install a lasting and impactful change and transform the hospital's brand to a strong brand? This calls for a pilot project. Those interested give me a call.

The speakers at the Healthcare Management Day were inspired and inspiring, supportive, challenging, confrontational for the wide range of health professionals attending. Thanks to Frank Goedertier and Steven Van Belleghem to open many eyes and minds. If their plea leads to only one or a few initiatives in this country to engage in a "Patient Experience" project this day was worthwhile. And as the healthcare sector is known to pick up on initiatives from competition we then soon will see changes in many organizations. The patient, being only human, will appreciate it.

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