

# ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE FOR DAY PATIENTS AT A LIFE HEALTHCARE FACILITY

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## INTRODUCTION

The Beryl Institute defines patient experience as “the sum of all interactions, shaped by an organisation’s culture, that influence patient perceptions across the continuum of care” (Wolf 2023). Patient experience can be measured through good nursing care that includes adequate skill, correct staff numbers, attitude of employees, effective communication and efficient administrative processes (Khitam 2019). The healthcare environment is currently experiencing challenges in regards to resources and administrative issues, that are emphasising the focus on reducing the length of stay in-hospital, improved clinical outcomes and cost effectiveness (Khitam 2019). It has also become increasingly more competitive, and studying patient experience assists healthcare providers to better understand patient perspectives in service delivery and how to improve patient experience (Janet 2019). There are various strategies that can be implemented to improve patient experience such as minimising waiting times, ensuring a clean environment and making waiting areas comfortable (Performance Health Partners 2023). At Life Healthcare, routine post discharge surveys (PDS) are electronically sent to patients to determine their experience whilst they were admitted in the hospital. Various touchpoints are monitored, namely: overall experience, recommend score, admission staff, discharge information, doctors, food, hospital environment, medication information, nursing staff, pain management and responsiveness of staff. During the period of October 2022 till December 2022, a decline was noted in the scores of the following touchpoints, although most of the touchpoints targets were met:

Top Box	Target	Oct	Nov	Dec	Trend
Admission staff	97	98,40	97,51	96,05	
Discharge information	71	75,79	75,31	74,22	
Food	70	71,78	77,85	71,07	
Nursing staff	80	84,45	82,78	77,75	
Pain management	82	83,70	86,92	81,53	
Responsiveness of staff	78	78,83	83,41	77,50	

A declining trend was identified in six of the patient experience touchpoints, namely: admission staff, discharge information, food, nursing staff, pain management and responsiveness of staff. In addition to above, according to anecdotal evidence expressed, a few other problem areas were identified:

- Delay in admissions of patients
- Over crowded reception area
- Rushed admissions in the ward
- Delay in start of theatre slates
- Delay in discharges leading to delayed afternoon admissions (bed availability)
- New competitor in the market

The Life Healthcare Group as a healthcare provider, should be at the forefront in enhancing the patient’s experience to attract patients to use the service. A need was identified by a Life Healthcare facility in the Border-Kei region to re-evaluate in-hospital processes and identify areas of improvement to enhance the experience for day patients at their acute facility to ensure a hassle-free and enjoyable experience for their patients.

## METHODS

An initial meeting was held with all the relevant heads of departments of nursing, reception, maintenance, pharmacy and services to ensure the establishment of the project team and to set out the goal of the project, namely enhancing the patient experience of the day surgery patients at their facility. Thereafter, a day was spent at the facility to observe the patient’s journey from arrival at the hospital until discharge and to take note of all areas that could influence the patient’s experience either positively or negatively. Special attention was given to areas that created bottlenecks. Unstructured interviews were held with key role players, namely the night quality supervisors, unit managers, nurse manager, nursing standards manager, surgeons and patients to determine their perception of how to improve the patient’s experience. Open-ended questions were used to identify areas that they perceived as needing improvement and suggestions as to what can be done better. Figure 1 displays the themes that were identified by the different role players.

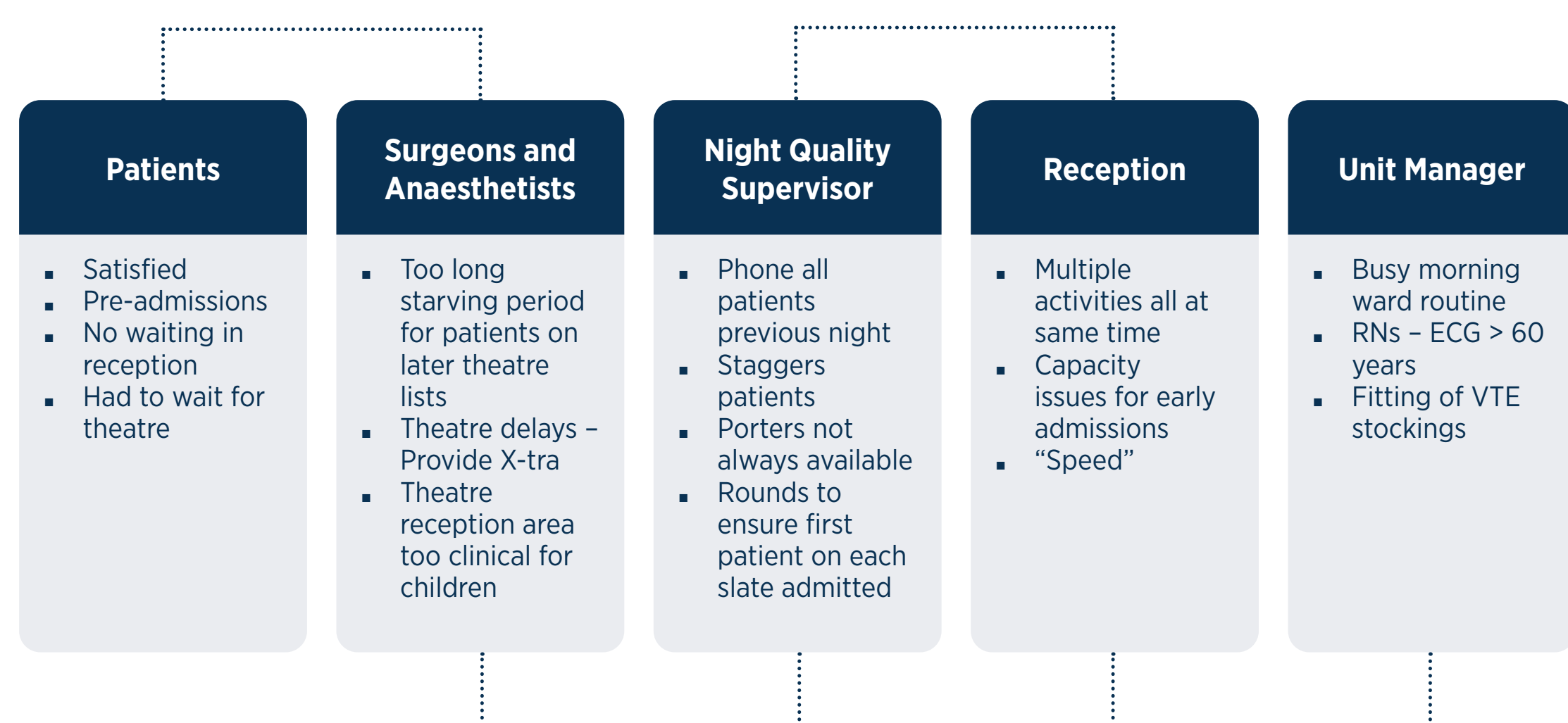


Figure 1: Feedback from role players during unstructured interviews

A follow-up meeting was held with the project team and an action plan was drafted with expected date of implementation on 30 May 2023. Weekly check-in meetings were scheduled to keep track of progress till implementation date.

Different strategies were implemented to improve the patient journey:

- The first process was to establish a pre-admissions clinic and to encourage doctors’ rooms to send patients to pre-admissions to complete their documentation before the day of admission
- A priority check-in booth for day surgery patients in the reception area was created
- This ensured that the day surgery patients did not have a long waiting time in reception as they were quickly admitted and directed to the ward
- A day lounge with a coffee station was designed where patients and their families could wait until they were taken to the ward for admission
- A dedicated day ward was created that was geared towards quick, efficient, and quality nursing care
- Medication prescriptions were scanned from theatre recovery to the pharmacy for the patients’ To Take Home (TTO) medication in order to prevent delays
- Pre-packed meals ensured that patients could have nourishment as soon as they were clinically able to

The effectiveness of implementation would be measured by the hospital’s post discharge surveys and comment cards statistics.

## RESULTS

On the day of implementation, five patients (n=5) were interviewed with 100% of patients expressing a positive experience and were impressed with how smooth their hospital stay was. Comment cards were monitored in the ward for the month of June 2023 as per Life Healthcare’s Customer Relations Management work procedure. A sample of nineteen comment cards (n=19) was used. 18 patients (95%) had positive comments and only one negative comment card (5%) was received. The patient discharge survey statistics (PDS) for period October 2022 till July 2023 were used as trending measures to monitor improvement of patient experience. Patient experience has improved in the following touchpoints after implementation of the project in June 2023 as per table below.

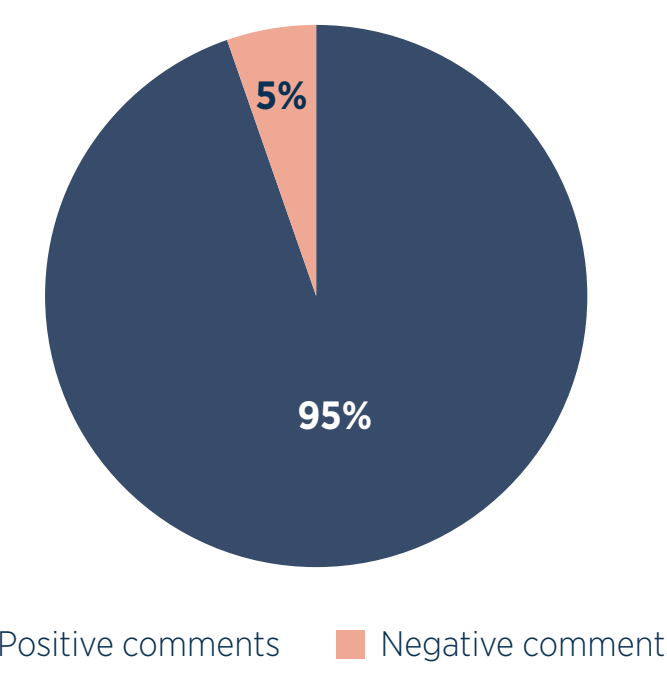


Figure 3: Comment Cards

Top Box	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Trend
Admission staff	98,40	97,51	96,05	96,32	95,63	96,41	96,56	97,15	98,73	98,37	
Discharge information	75,79	75,31	74,22	77,48	72,53	73,27	70,57	72,22	74,06	69,89	
Food	71,78	77,85	71,07	72,18	70,20	63,79	63,27	66,22	64,58	65,22	
Hospital environment	78,20	75,46	77,45	75,18	70,67	74,57	69,94	70,45	69,90	80,25	
Medication information	67,62	67,20	69,34	69,79	67,89	64,17	67,78	66,67	65,37	71,53	
Nursing staff	84,45	82,78	77,75	76,60	76,91	78,32	77,48	76,14	73,43	76,26	
Pain management	83,70	86,92	81,53	83,52	82,85	81,21	79,86	80,45	75,82	81,82	
Responsiveness of staff	78,83	83,41	77,50	73,87	76,29	74,29	74,90	74,01	69,26	79,84	

Table 1: Post-discharge survey

The touch point for admission staff has shown an upward trend and has reached the highest score in June at 98,73% , reaching the goal of 97%. Discharge information has not improved and continued with the downward trend. This can be due to the fact that none of the actions implemented incorporated aspects of discharge information. Food has remained steady at a low trend with not reaching the target of 70%. Nursing staff have seen an improvement in July with an upward trajectory, but still not reached the target of 80%. Pain management has improved from June to July, and missing the target of 82% by 0,2%. Responsiveness of staff has improved from June to July and reaching the target of 78%.

The hospital environment and medication information touch points have met the targets of 73% and 66% respectively, and were not initially identified as problem areas. But with the implementation of the project, an improvement can be noted in both touchpoints, with both the hospital environment and medication information reaching the highest score for the financial year at 80,25% and 71,53% respectively.

The implementation of the priority check-in desk in admissions has resulted in a better experience for the day surgery patients. There were no delays reported in the reception area and patients were moved into the day ward. The creation of the day lounge had a positive effect on the patient with a significant increase noted in July 2023. Photo 1 and Photo 2 show the day lounge with the coffee station.



Photo 1: Day lounge



Photo 2: Coffee station

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Limitations:

- Patient experience scores did not exclude long term patients PDS scores
- Unable to measure other efficiencies through statistics, for example: impact on waiting times, impact on theatre slates
- Project only implemented for 2 months, full review to be done in January 2024

### Recommendations:

- Implementation of all or some strategies in other hospitals
- Best operating practice

## CONCLUSION

Initial results are indicative of an improvement in the patient experience of day surgery patients at the Life Healthcare facility. Due to the success of the project, it is suggested that the project can be implemented in other Life Healthcare facilities. This will ensure a positive and life-changing experience for all our patients undergoing one-day surgery. Life Healthcare will remain steadfast in ensuring cost-effective, quality care to all our patients in the ever-changing and modern healthcare environment.

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