

## Ask Jeeves: Concierge Services for Hospitals

By Todd Wheeler

How may I help you?" That's a question more and more nurses across the country are hearing from their hospital's in-house concierge service. The reason for the perk—employee satisfaction and bottom-line results. Recruiting and retaining nurses is a critical and costly budgetary component, and many hospitals are saving hundreds of thousands of dollars by providing the right concierge service.

Based on anecdotal evidence—both verbal and written—from nurses, they appreciate the value these services have on their personal and professional lives. On average, a single nurse will save as many as five hours per month by using a hospital's concierge service. When that number is multiplied by an average of 500 requests per month placed by a hospital's staff, a hospital can save its nurses as much as \$300,000 per year in personal time (when multiplied by a \$25 per hour salary). To illustrate further, assuming a hospital has 600 nurses making 500 requests in a month, the following estimates would hold true: 500 requests multiplied by two hours saved per request, multiplied by \$25 per hour equals a \$25,000 cost savings, or recovered productivity, per month. In terms of cost savings to the hospital—specifically regarding recruitment and retention—the value isn't available in hard numbers, but is likely worth many times the amount a hospital saves its nurses in lost personal time.

This is especially important when considering that one of the top five priorities listed by the Center for American Nurses in their 2005 report *Workplace of the Future: Spotlight on the Mature Nursing Workforce* was the "lack of incentives for the retention of mature nurses." One of the report's proposed solutions for nurse retention is implementing concierge services for them. Additionally, with job dissatisfaction a primary reason why nurses leave the job, and publications such as *Fortune Magazine* reporting that one-third of the nation's "Top Companies to Work For" offer concierge services, "How can I help you today?" is a question more hospitals should be asking their nurses.

But what is the right concierge service? Even though the concierge industry is hundreds of years old, it is still in its infancy when delivered to hospital nursing staffs. Since it is so early in the market's development, there is little or no frame of reference. Basing a decision on cost alone can be disastrous because there are some concierge services that are inexpensive but won't live up to a hospital's expectations. Either the services aren't as extensive, or the delivery is poor and unprofessional. This approach could do more harm than good if nurses aren't getting the level of service or results they expect.

Therefore, a hospital's executive team must consider many factors before implementing a concierge program, such as finding out how a service provider tracks results, making sure the provider specializes in and understands the needs of the health care industry; and understanding the range of services they provide.

The executive team should also ask the concierge providers questions such as: how do they build trust and engage nurses; what key performance indicators do they use to measure success; do they have flexible hours to best accommodate your staff; what are their turnover numbers? A company with high turnover won't help keep yours low.

Make sure the concierge service you're considering understands the competitive nature and specific staffing challenges of your campus. It would be a mistake to hire a provider that isn't aware of the high priority and dependency a hospital has on its nurses. Managing the needs of patients and families is very different from taking care of staff.

Due to capacity, some concierge companies often limit their range of services to running errands, while others will “go to the ends of the earth” to provide a true work/life benefit for your nursing staff. This could include, but is in no way limited to: researching day care services, coordinating automotive services, handling mailing and shipping needs, gift wrapping for the holidays or special occasions, grocery and personal shopping, laundry and dry-cleaning, research, house cleaning and even helping plan and coordinate a wedding. These are all perks that will be invaluable to your nurses and your recruitment/retention efforts.

To provide an effective program, most hospitals require an on-site concierge office. This convenient, centrally located office is the place where nurses can drop in, make their request and leave knowing their concierge is taking care of them.

While all concierge companies provide e-mail as a means of making requests, some, simply due to the volume of requests they receive, have created Web-based management systems. These systems increase the concierge’s efficiency and allow hundreds of requests to be processed each month. Additionally, these systems are the backbone for data gathering and generating performance reports.

A good concierge service will have strong references and testimonials. Be sure to speak to the people at the organizations they already represent.

Some concierge companies offer consulting services to help hospitals and health systems with the initial decision-making process; they can help determine whether a particular program will benefit a hospital.

They can help plan the program and the structure that will work best in a specific hospital’s environment. They also help determine how to implement and market the services effectively.

This will provide you with important information on what to do next, how to move forward and how to get the absolute best result from your program.

Considering the condition of today’s health care industry, finding new ways to recruit and retain the very best nursing staff is critical. Concierge services can improve nurse loyalty while saving hundreds of thousands of dollars in the process.

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