

The Listening Post: rewards of listening to our customers



[Prof. Rajit Mehta](#)

*****@***maxhealthcare.com

Managing Director & Chief
Executive Officer, Max Healthcare

[Twitter](#)

Good Health is something that all of us look forward to. Many a times we also take it for granted. Caring for our health is an intrinsic part of our daily lives. We watch what we eat, we exercise, we consume tonnes of advice on managing our health needs and we visit healthcare facilities when we believe we need expert care. When we engage with a healthcare service provider, our expectation is to receive a hassle-free, evidence-based expert care, which allows us to recover quickly.

When Max Healthcare began its journey more than 15 years ago, it identified this existing gap between expectations from the healthcare providers and the services being provided. As a provider of tertiary services based on clinical expertise, technology and infrastructure, to attain global standards in service excellence was a must. Additionally, ensuring that all touchpoints of its ecosystem deliver a consistent, reliable and great customer experience was equally important.

The overall experience of service excellence including empathy, post-operative care, hygiene, in-room services and that little bit extra, which is indefinable, but touches the hearts of the patients was something that Max Healthcare hoped to offer.

With this vision in mind, Max Healthcare designed a superlative customer experience. However, we soon learned that customer experience and satisfaction levels are never static. Thus, the processes around the customer experiences need to be constantly updated and the inputs for this exercise were best sourced from our patients themselves.

In this context, it was felt that consistent listening was essential to achieve process improvements and customer satisfaction. From gathering views from the clinical and administrative staff, to capturing patient feedback, assessing operational processes and practices has to be both an inward and outward-facing exercise. Hence, from its inception, Max Healthcare had established a mechanism based on the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAPS) survey standards practiced by global healthcare service providers/ robust processes and protocols to deliver best-in-class clinical and non-medical services. The high satisfaction ratings were a testimony to our efforts.

Yet, as often observed, when brands choose to bask in past glory, they end-up distancing themselves from their ever-changing reality. Today, with evolving customer segments, excellence in medical and non-medical services at healthcare organisations, is perceived as basic hygiene. For a service provider with such deep-rooted impact on human lives, it is necessary to delve further into diverse aspects of treatment and care and gather insights on customer satisfaction. So, in partnership with a leading market research agency – IMRB – Max Healthcare pioneered a comprehensive feedback process in Indian healthcare.

The project was christened “The Listening Post”.

The Listening Post essentially measured the customer satisfaction at various touch points in the hospital. These included touch-points such as the Front Office, The consultation rooms in the OPD, the Admission and Discharge points, the Emergency, the Pharmacy and in-patient services such as the Nursing Services, F&B and Housekeeping.

The process was established with the objective of assessing the quality of the experience a patient and their attendants go through while visiting Max hospitals. This is the starting point to identify and address critical areas which will lead to the overall improvement in a patient’s perception of the brand. This qualitative assessment, thus, needs to be as detailed as possible, helping gather actionable information that can be directly

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linked to operational processes and practices.

A 360 degree research approach was adopted, which included the patients (in-patient and out-patient), their attendants and care providers (including all departments in the value chain). The survey tracked scores for Max Healthcare's OPD & IPD departments across each hospital unit in the network, monthly. The scores were then compared to evaluate performance across hospitals. Every month, a total of 1892 respondents (1180 OPD and 712 IPD patients) across 13 hospitals are interviewed in this survey. The research team from IMRB Live labs conducts in-depth household interactions, multiple focus-group discussions with patients, care-takers, other family members to understand perceptions, past experiences, expectations and competitive perceptions.

An established framework – The Walker Loyalty framework was identified as a reliable basis for understanding the determinants of customer satisfaction and loyalty. It helps validate whether a hospital's internal process metrics are relevant to a patient's satisfaction and what are the areas that need to be aligned to patient expectations. For example, it was observed that Front office, Doctors and Nursing are the top three impactful processes that decide the majority of a patient's hospital experience.

Apart from identifying priorities to improve brand perception, the exercise was very useful in detecting systemic problems and process gaps so that preventions could be designed before they become problems.

For example, for OPDs, this has brought granular findings like period of the day when patient satisfaction levels fluctuate and factors that impact these – long waiting time, increased patient load at certain times of the day, appointment re-scheduling concerns etc. Such results, when mapped against manpower assessment and allocation improved service level standards. On an organisation-wide scale, this caused a major positive disruption and competitive improvement across different departments and specialties based on patient satisfaction scores. In the last two years, this has resulted in patient satisfaction scores going up from a baseline of 46% to the present levels of 74%. Each year the bar on patient satisfaction score goes up further.

The Walker Model as suggested by IMRB gave us an insight that the Front office has a disproportionate impact on the overall patient experience with the hospital. This impact was similar to that of the Doctors which was very counterintuitive to our earlier beliefs. Based on this insight, the Front office transformation journey was undertaken and improvements in this function has given us significant improvements in overall patient experience

The Discharge process feedback and scores gave us an insight that the patient was extremely concerned about the time taken to Discharge in the hospital. A companywide initiative to streamline the Discharge process was undertaken and improvement in TATs and expectation setting with patients at each stage of the discharge steps has resulted in overall patient experience. The overall Brand positioning of 'Eager to get you home' is also a result of our patient listening mechanism and reinforced through our IMRB patient listening mechanism

A constant ears-to-the ground approach has offered a much-needed reality check for the organisation and throw-up many areas of improvement and the journey continues.

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