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# Building a patient-centric culture in a multinational healthcare provider

## The Affidea Experience



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Today, healthcare providers are facing numerous pressures and a hypercompetitive environment in which they should respond to patient needs in a personalised way. The focus on clinical excellence and outstanding medical outcomes can sometimes make healthcare providers lose sight of an important aspect of providing effective care: the patient experience and the attitude and behaviour of the caregivers (including empathy), that are impacting not only patients' well-being but also clinical outcomes.

Many studies have shown that a good rapport between patients and all caregivers who interact with them – a better customer experience, results in better clinical outcomes, greater patient satisfaction, lower rates of physician burnout<sup>1</sup> and, last but not least, it can be a key differentiator in terms of creating company's competitive advantage and impacting its financial performance (both the top and bottom line)<sup>2</sup>.

We understand patients visiting our centres are often anxious and afraid of their medical outcome. They need to feel listened to, cared for and reassured.

At Affidea, our shared goal has always been to provide outstanding and compassionate care, every step along the patient journey and in the same time creating a great working environment for our staff.

Having patient experience at the heart of everything we do, we realised that we require more than world-class medical care. We realised that we are also required to pay special attention to our patient's comfort, to their emotional and educational needs and in order to achieve this we needed highly engaged staff, which basically translates to satisfied employees who are aligned with the values and mission of the company.

Taking these into consideration, we have

designed an internal programme targeting all above. Knowing that consumers want the same qualities in healthcare companies that they value in non-healthcare settings<sup>3</sup>, we partnered with a Swiss hospitality consultancy to inspire ourselves with know-how of a leading from the customer experience perspective industry in the Programme design. And in 2016 we started to launch the Affinity Programme across the Group, recognising in this way the patient experience as a strategic objective and a key imperative of our staff.

We have launched this Programme as part of company rebranding aiming at embedding the company values in daily behaviour of our staff and patient experience standards, strengthening in this way our organisational culture. We believed that it will make a difference, primarily to our patients, as well as will benefit other stakeholders, including our centres' staff, who have to deal with emotionally and professionally tough situations day-in, day-out.

The Affinity Programme represents, in fact, a holistic approach to establishing a patient centric culture that was turned into Standard Operating Procedures and other deliverables defining company patient experience bluebook, targeting:

- building common standards and improving patient experience;
- reinvigorating our staff's passion for their work;
- elevating our organisation.

Operationalising the patient experience and making it a part of the daily routines was therefore, our main challenge, which we have addressed in the following deliverables:

- Affidea Culture Programme – a training explaining Affidea culture and core values and raising the awareness about the importance of outstanding customer service to all staff;
- Designing and launching new standards of

patient care delivery and embedding them in existing operational processes;

- Aligning Human Resources processes to hire, retain and reward the right people exemplifying in their behaviour the Affidea values and patient centric approach.

Celebrating successes and rewarding the patient centric behaviours were key components of the programme supporting it from the change management perspective.

## MILESTONES IN RESHAPING THE PATIENT'S EXPERIENCE

The Programme is essentially aimed at improving patient experience within centres and increasing the level of empathy we demonstrate to our patients as individuals and as an organisation.

Therefore, upgrade and unification of the physical environment of the medical centres and the attitude of our staff members to each other and toward patients were seen as priorities in the milestones of our Affinity Programme.

### • Consistency in behaviour and communication

Through the Affinity Programme, we make sure that training is being delivered to our staff members, at all levels, not only about the Affidea culture, values but also about the importance of empathy and communication and handling difficult situations, as we recognise the impact of communication of the caregivers with their patients for the satisfaction of the latter and the medical outcomes.

### • Standardising patient experience procedures & sustaining the programme impact

We have 'coded' patient experience standards by creating our own "Book of Affinity" which contains all procedures related to delivering outstanding customer service in our centres. It provides directions to all Affidea departments, medical centres and staff that enables Affidea to provide uniform, empathetic and high-quality customer service.

In order to sustain the new patient care standards and the behavioural change, but also to make Affinity a living programme and part of organisational culture, we have decided to introduce the 'Affinity Champions'. They are the Affidea staff members who work in patient-facing roles and exhibit excellent customer service behaviour and commitment to upholding Affidea values. They are



the role models in patient care who possess and demonstrate predefined competencies that will help them train others on Affinity Standard Operating Procedures (in a format of short 15-20 minutes training sessions called 'skills pills') on an ongoing basis to embed them in the company 'DNA'.

### • Newly designed centres to improve patient comfort

Patient experience was also considered when it comes to the physical environment of our centres.

The new design we have created is geared around patient experience, designed to reduce anxiety and ensure comfort and privacy for our patients, relatives and friends. We want our patients to feel safe, supported and confident that they will receive high quality medical service.

### Affidea Lithuania case: From a leading healthcare provider to the "Best employer"

Numerous studies have linked strong employee engagement with significant improvements in patient care and satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>

Our Affinity programme has already shown its results, by Affidea being recognised as a great place to work in one of the countries where we have already launched our Programme.

In March this year, Affidea Lithuania has been awarded 'AON Best Employer Baltics 2017'.

This is proof of our long-standing commitment for staff satisfaction and a living outcome of our Affinity programme for staff and patient experience. ■

<sup>1</sup> 2 Remedies for reducing burnout among healthcare workers, Joy Plemmons, Gallup, March 2018

<sup>2</sup> Accenture, May 2016

<sup>3</sup> McKinsey & The Company Debunking common myths about healthcare consumerism by Jenny Cordina, Rohit Kumar, and Christa Moss, December 2015

<sup>4</sup> Strengthening Care through Engagement.™ Gallup Consulting Healthcare Practice, 2014