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Taking a page from hospitality, MedStar creates app to get a handle on customer service

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By: Tina Reed

Hospitals can't just be about healing anymore.

In the world of the Affordable Care Act — where [patient satisfaction helps determine reimbursement rates](#)— hospitals also have to worry about customer service. Recently, [Kaiser Health News](#) reported how some D.C.-area hospitals have [taken a page from the book of hospitality](#). For instance, [Inova Health System](#) hired a customer service expert who cut his teeth at [Marriott](#) and the [Ritz-Carlton](#).

"Health care delivery is not just the quality of care anymore. It's whether patients are satisfied," said [Ariam Gebrehiwot](#), a senior nursing director for Ambulatory Services at [MedStar Washington Hospital Center](#).

But too often, hospital officials don't hear about problems until the

patient is ready to go home or has already left the hospital. So Gebrehiwot and emergency room physician Dr. Kevin Maloy created an app to combat the problem.

That app, called Leader eRounding, was created to track the concerns raised with nurse leaders during their daily rounds. Issues discussed could be as simple as meal delivery or making sure rooms are clean, or could involve whether a patient felt they understood their medication regimen or if their pain was well-controlled, said [Nicole Thompson](#), a nursing director.

While those concerns used to be written down on pieces of paper and addressed at the unit level, they are now compiled electronically in a way to identify trends, Gebrehiwot said. That matters because now, for instance, the director of nutrition services might be more quickly contacted if multiple units have reports of late or incorrect meals in a given day. It's among a number of different ways MedStar [tracks patient safety](#) and satisfaction.

[MedStar Health](#) gave iPads to every unit in every hospital in order to use the app. Thompson said she now uses the app every day. "If there are any issues or concerns, we are able to address them now just in time. It gives us an opportunity to improve," she said.

But, ask anyone in hospitality: Customer service can be a tricky thing. Even with this tool in place, patient satisfaction scores have remained relatively flat in the year and a half of available data, Gebrehiwot said. But individual drivers that impact patient satisfaction have steadily shown improvement, such as room cleanliness or communication with nursing staff, she said.

Ultimately, that will help the hospital change consumers' minds, she said, as they decide where they want care.