

Patient Experience Skill Training Tool: Ask Open-Ended Questions during a Handoff



Here is a three-part patient experience skill training tool you can use with your team. *The goal:* To improve communication during handoffs of patients and family members.

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Patient Experience Skill Training Tool
Fact Sheet: Communicating during Handoffs

During a handoff, if you can get the patient or family member talking, you'll be able to find out their thoughts, concerns and anxieties in time to address them before passing them along. Open-ended questions work much better than closed-ended questions in getting the customer talking.

More often than not, we ask patients a lot of yes-no questions or questions that can be answered with one word. (E.g. "Are you clear about what's happening next?") This gives the message that we don't really have time for much more than a one-word answer. So we learn very little about what's going on in the customer's mind. If instead we ask **open-ended questions**, we invite patients and coworkers to tell us what's on their mind, so we can address this before we pass them along to the next step in the service.

Closed-ended Question	Open-ended Question
Are you okay from here?	What questions do you have about what's happening next?
Do you need anything before I go?	How can I help you get more comfortable before I go?
Do you want help?	How can I help you feel ready to go home?

After introducing your team to the idea of open-ended questions, ask them to practice by completing this worksheet with a partner. Fill in the empty rows with closed-ended questions typical during handoffs your team currently handles.



Patient Experience Skill Training Tool
Practice Worksheet: Practice Identifying Open-Ended Questions for Use during Handoffs

Closed-Ended Question	Open-ended Question?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ready to go home? • Eager to go home? • Clear about what's next? 	
To coworker: "Is what I'm giving you clear?"	
To visitor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you have a good visit? • Will we see you tomorrow? • Isn't your dad doing great? 	

(Suggested Answers for first worksheet)

Closed-Ended Question	Open-ended Question (a few ideas)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ready to go home? • Eager to go home? • Clear about what's next? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What feels unfinished for you at this point? • What else can I do to help you prepare to go home? • How are you feeling about going home? • What concerns do you have about going home?
To coworker: "Is what I'm giving you clear?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What questions do you have before I pass this on to you? • What's unclear about what to do? • How do you feel about doing this on your own?
To visitor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you have a good visit? • Will we see you tomorrow? • Isn't your dad doing great? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are you feeling about this visit? • What are people thinking about visiting again tomorrow? • How do you think your dad is doing?



Patient Experience Skill Training Tool

Planning Worksheet: Develop Questions for YOUR Job

Now, engage your team in thinking about the handoffs that are routine parts of their jobs. For each step in the handoff help your team identify one good open-ended question to ask of the customer during that step, so that the staff member can address the customer's needs and concerns.

Process Step during Handoff	Open-Ended Question That We Should Ask ROUTINELY