

California Hospital Raises the Bar on Hospital Customer Service by Elevating Security Officers to a New Role

Alta Bates Summit Medical Center

Situation: Visiting a hospital or emergency department is often a stressful experience because of unfamiliarity with the physical layout and the fear of potential medical procedures. And, visits to emergency departments are increasing. According to the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics' National Health Care Survey, the annual number of emergency department (ED) visits jumped from 90.3 million in 1996 to more than 110 million in 2006, a 32 percent increase.

In addition to increased visits, there is also an increase in wait time. According to a National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care survey, the median amount of time between registering in the emergency department and being examined by a physician was 22 minutes in 1997. By 2004, the median wait time was 30 minutes. The stress factor rises accordingly.

Alta Bates Summit Medical Center operates a private nonprofit hospital system spanning three campuses in Berkley and Oakland, CA. Specializing in clinical and community outreach, Alta Bates Summit offers advanced medical care through 30 programs located in the East Bay, including behavioral health, oncology, orthopedics, rehabilitation, cardiovascular, diabetes, neuroscience and women's services. Its facilities have a combined capacity of more than 1,000 beds, 5,000 employees and more than 1,100 physicians. Its women and infants services deliver nearly 8,000 births each year, one of the highest rates in the state.

Since 2003, Allied Universal Security Services has provided security for Alta Bates Summit, including interior and exterior patrols and staffing posts at the hospital's lobby and emergency department entrances. New security officers must complete an orientation session, 40 hours of on-the-job training and must be Level 1 certified in Management of Aggressive Behavior (MOAB) with additional certifications required soon after. Further training from Allied Universal's healthcare curriculum includes courses on HIPAA privacy regulations, blood borne pathogens, and customer service, as well as Alta Bates Summit's Self Instruction Manuals.

Under the leadership of Dave Lawson, Alta Bates Summit Medical Center's Administrative Director of Support Services, customer service has become a vital component of the hospital's operations. A patient or visitor's first contact is often with a parking attendant or an Allied Universal security officer and the first impression has to be positive, pleasant and productive.

Challenge: While a hospital security officer is trained for a very specific purpose, Lawson felt that a more proactive and less intimidating authority figure should supplement the security officers to bring a more personal level of customer service to people entering the hospital or the ED.

With the increasing number of people seeking medical care at hospitals and utilizing the ED every year, Lawson's immediate challenge was to create a concierge-type

Location:

Alta Bates Summit Medical Center
Berkley, CA

Statistics:

- > Three Campus Health System
- > Customer Service Approach to Security



system that would augment the efforts of security officers to give hospital visitors a new comfort level and more individualized attention.

Solution: Lawson and Kelly Murcraay, Allied Universal Vice President of Operations, discussed Lawson's concept and implemented an ambassador program. This customer-service focused program offers a multi-faceted role where the Allied Universal security ambassadors are equally focused on customer service and security. A specific job description, enhanced customer service training, specialized recruiting, and uniforms are critical to this unique position. The Allied Universal Ambassadors were an addition to the existing security program.

"In a hospital setting, security officers are given a job function or have post orders to follow. What these officers do is important, but most aren't focused on expressing compassion or highlighting what the hospital does or has to offer," Lawson explained.

"To satisfy this need, we identified potential personnel and provided the specific training and uniforms to establish them as Allied Universal ambassadors," Murcraay explained. "With enhanced customer service training, as well as maximum MOAB Certificate training, the new ambassadors improve service for people entering the hospital and ED."

"It takes a special person to provide enhanced customer service," Lawson said. "It's going to the next level of communicating, answering questions, or providing information and, if needed, sending them to a higher information source. We selected individuals willing to step outside of the box to do anything necessary to assist a visitor and proactively deliver customer service."

The Allied Universal security ambassador located at Alta Bates Summit's main entrance next to the security officer at the reception desk makes sure that people walking in the door are greeted, taken care of, given great directions and, if needed, escorted to a unit or department.

Lou Scott, the enthusiastic, personable Allied Universal ambassador at the hospital's main entrance, said he approaches visitors and takes them where they want to go, assists them with wheelchairs, gets them food vouchers, parking vouchers and much more.

"I approach people knowing that they're probably under a lot of stress and assure them that they're in good hands. I tell them that the hospital staff are some of the best on the planet at taking care of them or their loved ones," Scott said. "People don't expect to be treated like that when they come into a hospital. They expect to be treated like a number. My job is to treat them like family."

Scott, who has devoted a dozen years of service to Allied Universal, also participates in hospital groups to keep abreast of activities that may help in his rapport with visitors and share information on customer service and security initiatives.

The Allied Universal ambassador in the hectic ED works along side three Allied Universal security officers. "Look at this from a patient's viewpoint," Murcraay said. "If you're sitting in the emergency department for a length of time waiting to be called, the Allied Universal Ambassador gives you someone to talk to, someone to bring you a cup of water or a blanket, to keep you comfortable and provide up -to-date information. Those small gestures can be very reassuring."

While trained in all aspects of healthcare security, the role of the compassionate Allied Universal Ambassador usually mitigates any escalation of potentially tense situations.

Results: The hospital's administration has been inundated with praise for Allied Universal ambassador Lou Scott. For example: *"Just a short note of gratitude for your thoughtfulness at providing someone as helpful and supportive as Lou Scott. I came to the hospital alone, unable to walk, frightened and needing an x-ray and a sonogram. Mr. Scott was a kind soul who calmed me down and wheeled me wherever I had to go. I do not think I could have made it from the check-in to the x-ray and from the sonogram to my car without his generous support. Thank you for providing him to assist folks like me who need help!"*

"The public loves it," Lawson said. "The Allied Universal ambassadors are very approachable."

The program allows Allied Universal to help fulfill the hospital's mission to *“enhance the health and well being of people in the communities we serve through compassion and excellence.”* Award-winning training, quality personnel and experienced management available to proactively address client needs allows Allied Universal to tailor its security programs to meet unique requirements

Lawson said the new program “gives us a higher standard of customer service and patient satisfaction scores for our emergency departments.” He hopes to expand the program as other departments see the success of the Allied Universal ambassadors and begin to ask for the same.