

Gratitude and Recognition in a Hospital Setting: Addressing Provider Well-Being and Patient Outcomes

American Journal of Medical Quality

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DOI: 10.1177/1062860618772281

ajmq.sagepub.com



Caitlin Hamilton, BS¹, Helge Osterhold, PhD, MFT^{2,3},
Jessica Chao, PharmD, MBA⁴, Kristin Chu, MBA⁴, and Arup Roy-Burman, MD⁴

Mary Reich Cooper, MD, JD, Sun Young Kim, MD, PhD, CMQ,
Sydney M. Ramsey, BS, and Prajakta Yeragi, MD, Section Editors

Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, loss of meaning in work, and feelings of ineffectiveness.¹ Burnout affects more than 50% of physicians¹ and is associated with medical errors.² Preventing burnout should improve patient outcomes.

Those who practice gratitude express optimism and well-being³ and may experience less burnout. In nursing, meaningful recognition is a predictor of decreased burnout.⁴ At UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital, we aimed to promote engagement and fight burnout by fostering an interprofessional culture of gratitude through peer recognition. We developed a point-of-care (POC) recognition app for an existing cloud-based collaboration platform, accessible via desktop and mobile. In-app recognition was promoted by gamification (application of gaming mechanics in non-game contexts to motivate desired behaviors) with intermittent competitions between hospital units.

Baseline preimplementation survey data showed 82.3% of staff respondents (n= 270) felt it was important to receive written recognition, while only 21.5% received written recognition more than once monthly. The recognition app was initially deployed in the pediatric and cardiac intensive care units (ICU), and then subsequently across all pediatric units. Four 1-month-long interunit gamified recognition competitions were run over 18 months; the majority of in-app recognitions were submitted during competitions. In 2015, 2451 in-app recognitions were sent by 227 unique users (38 physicians; 189 nurses and staff) to 561 unique recipients, while only 60 recognitions were sent through the hospital's legacy Human Resources thanks program.

Patient satisfaction scores (Press-Ganey, nurse-sensitive metrics) were tracked in the pediatric and cardiac ICU over 6 consecutive quarters, beginning from initial deployment. Baseline mean score was 87.5, improving to 89.8 and 95.4 in consecutive quarters. Gamified promotion was discontinued for 2 quarters, with mean falling to 92.6 and 91.3, respectively. Gamification was reinstated, with mean improving to 95.2.

POC digital technology can help promote interprofessional gratitude, with associated patient satisfaction. Since implementation of the recognition app, gamified quality improvement training has been deployed on the same platform to provide "just-in-time" support to staff and improve patient safety.⁵ Mindfulness (attending to one's experience nonjudgmentally to improve well-being) reduces

burnout.⁶ Gratitude and mindfulness training, including author-guided meditation videos, have been added to allow staff on-demand access to well-being resources. A cloud-based approach to staff engagement and training may serve as a scalable low-cost solution to prevent burnout and improve patient outcomes.

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¹Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

²UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital, San Francisco, CA

³California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, CA

⁴University of California San Francisco, CA

Corresponding Author:

Caitlin Hamilton, BS, 500 N 18th St, Apt 910, Philadelphia, PA 19130.

Email: caitlin.d.hamilton@temple.edu