



A MEDIA PARTNERS CASE STUDY

Jackson Hospital: Building Communities With ... Pickles!



More than half of the hospitals in the U.S. are rural hospitals, providing access to emergency treatment, inpatient and outpatient care, and other essential health services to more than 50 million people residing outside of the nation’s urban areas.

Located near the Alabama border in the northwest Florida town of Marianna, Jackson Hospital is one of those rural hospitals, serving the nearly 50,000 residents of Jackson County and surrounding areas.

The hospital is a 100-bed facility that provides extensive medical services across the care spectrum:

- Emergency medicine
- Radiology services
- General medicine
- Infusion therapy
- Inpatient/outpatient surgery
- Physical, speech, and occupational therapies
- Laboratory services
- Wound healing and hyperbaric medicine therapy

IN ADDITION TO 24/7 ACCESS TO CARE THROUGH ITS EMERGENCY ROOM, JACKSON HOSPITAL OPERATES A SEPARATE QUICK CARE FACILITY TO DELIVER WALK-IN PRIMARY CARE FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN.

FLORIDA’S RURAL HOSPITALS

The Sunshine State considers its rural hospitals so vital that it addresses them in the Florida Statutes, noting that such facilities:

- Are the nucleus or “backbone” of rural health systems
- Are usually the only source of emergency medical care in rural areas
- Enhance their communities beyond the scope of healthcare
- Are among the largest employers in rural areas
- Substantially foster economic development and growth in their communities
- Contribute to lower accidental death rates in Florida’s rural counties
- Are widely viewed as integral to the welfare of rural communities

How the Hospital Got Its Pickle

When she was hired for the position of Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) in 2012, Robbin Pumphrey, RN, MBA/MSN, DNP, CENP, brought along something in addition to her impressive credentials.

And it turned out to be just the secret weapon Jackson Hospital needed to respond to changes in the healthcare landscape and a community that viewed the facility skeptically.

“When I started here, healthcare had shifted to a pay-for-performance approach,” Pumphrey explains. “CMS [the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services—a part of the Department of Health and Human Services that is responsible for overseeing Medicare, Medicaid and other federal healthcare

programs] rates hospitals on how they are doing in patient experience and quality. Hospitals can be penalized and money paid to them can be rescinded if quality doesn’t measure up.”

At the time Pumphrey joined Jackson Hospital’s administrative staff, patient experience scores were lagging, putting funding in jeopardy, but also coloring the community’s perception of the hospital. She wasted no time in rolling out a unique solution.

“AT THE HEALTHCARE FACILITY WHERE I WORKED PREVIOUSLY, I HAD SEEN MEDIA PARTNERS’ GIVE ‘EM THE PICKLE! PROGRAM. I KNEW THE VALUES IT TAUGHT, AND I FELT IT WAS JUST THE ANSWER WE NEEDED TO ADDRESS OUR PATIENT EXPERIENCE SCORES.”



Jackson Hospital Chief Nursing Officer Robbin Pumphrey, RN



Bob Farrell, Give 'em the PICKLE!,
Media Partners Corp.

About That Pickle Program

Based on the customer service wisdom and practices of the late Bob Farrell, Give 'em the PICKLE! is a Media Partners best-seller. Farrell, a motivational speaker and founder of a successful chain of ice cream parlors, formed his ideas about service based on a customer's request for extra pickles at one of his restaurants.

To Farrell, pickles came to represent the special or extra things employees can do to go above and beyond in their efforts to make customers happy. His program emphasizes service, attitude, consistency, and teamwork as the core principles underlying superior customer service.

"We began by showing the video and explaining where we were with our patient experience scores," Pumphrey says. "We trained the staff on the basics that Bob Farrell taught—being nice, friendly, and helpful. Actually walking with someone to a location they've asked about instead of simply pointing the way.

Then we asked people to think about what they were going to do for their Pickles, how they would make the Jackson Hospital experience special and meaningful for everyone with whom they came into contact. We did mandatory training on the Pickle program every year for about three years. Our patient experience scores rose tremendously."

Jackson Hospital's Mission, Vision and Values



Mission

To provide exceptional healthcare to every patient, every day



Vision

To be the best community healthcare system in the nation

Values



QUALITY:

Achieving the highest standard of care



SERVICE:

Anticipating and exceeding expectations



STEWARDSHIP:

Responsibly managing resources and pursuing community service



TEAMWORK:

Respecting others, working as a group and holding one another accountable



INNOVATION:

Taking initiative to explore new processes to improve outcomes

Pickles Become a Way of Life at Jackson Hospital

Pumphrey worked with Melanie Sellers, RN, the hospital's Director of Maternal/Child Nursing, to make Give 'em the PICKLE! a part of the ongoing orientation and onboarding for every new employee.

During orientation, hospital CEO C. James Platt reviews mission, vision, and values. Then new hires view the Pickle video, and Pumphrey and Sellers discuss the patient experience and customer service.

"We try to make it simple and emphasize that our work here isn't just about performing tasks. It is about making those connections with people," Pumphrey says. "The message is that no matter what you do or what your role is here at Jackson Hospital, you have a part in the overall experience, you have an impact on people."

She says that the values Farrell covered in the program reflect those of the hospital, and the training includes plenty of examples of positive Pickle behaviors. "Implementing the Pickle philosophy is really about making that human connection, doing what's right, and being part of a team," Pumphrey adds. "Whatever your job is here, you play a valuable role."



*Melanie Sellers, RN,
Director of Maternal/Child Nursing at Jackson Hospital*

How the Hospital's Pickle Program Works

Sellers, who oversees the Pickle program, says that it begins with visibility. The program is advertised in the patient guide that all hospital patients receive.

There are also special Pickle index cards available in every unit of the facility. Patients and staff use the cards to write up individuals who have exhibited outstanding customer service—who've provided Pickles.

"Patients can write cards on staff and staff members can write them up on each other," Sellers explains. The cards are collected in boxes conveniently located throughout the hospital.

Sellers meets monthly with Jackson Hospital's Employee Leadership Committee (ELC), a group of about 25 staff who represent varied roles and shifts. Together, they review the cards submitted for that month and nominate the Top 10 Pickles. From that group, they select a Pickle of the Month.

PICKLES RECEIVE RECOGNITION AND OTHER SPECIAL REWARDS

"All of those nominees join our administration team—the CEO, CNO, and CFO—for a sit-down luncheon," Sellers explains. "It is a nice meal served to the nominees every month by members of the ELC. At that gathering, the CEO reads the 10 Pickle cards describing the outstanding customer service those staff members provided and personally thanks them."

A Pickle of the Month recipient is announced at the luncheon, too. Along with that recognition, each monthly top winner receives a gift card, a Golden Pickle pin, a Pickle certificate, and their own Pickle parking permit that grants a special space close to the hospital.

"Pickles of the Month are placed in the running for Pickle of the Year," says Sellers. "Each January, the ELC meets again and reviews all of those monthly top Pickles, then selects a Pickle of the Year." At a hospital-wide celebration attended by Board members and

open to all employees, the Pickle of the Year is announced by CEO Platt. The recipient is awarded a Golden Pickle trophy and check of at least \$250."

Pickle recognition isn't limited to the monthly luncheons. Sellers and her team update a large bulletin board located across from the hospital cafeteria with the monthly nominees and the Pickle of the Month. Small paper pickles adorning the board also feature the names of every employee whose service was written up that month. A smaller board provides a year-long spotlight for the Pickle of the Year. Newspaper coverage of the Pickle honors, arranged by hospital PR/Marketing Director Amy Milton, and an electronic billboard adjacent to Jackson Hospital's Quick Care facility ensure that visibility extends to the hospital's community.

Pickles Build Communities Inside and Outside the Hospital

That idea of community is a central facet of Jackson Hospital's commitment to customer service and the success it has achieved through its innovative adaptation of Media Partners' Give 'em the PICKLE! training program.



From left: Jackson Hospital Chief Financial Officer Kevin Rovito and Case Management Director Lori Franklin look on as Employee (Pickle) of the Month winner Katie Finwall receives her certificate from hospital Chief Executive Officer Jim Platt.



Jackson Hospital's March 2019 Employee of the Month nominees are pictured with hospital CEO, Jim Platt (right rear).

INTERNAL EXCITEMENT AND TEAMWORK

Within the hospital, employees have embraced the program, says Sellers. "When we are decorating the bulletin board, people stop by to see if their names have made it this month. They are excited about being recognized for their efforts, and most of our award winners really go above and beyond."

Sellers tells of one recent honoree: "A secretary who works in our infusion center noticed that one of the chemo patients who came in wore shoes that were held together with duct tape. She went out and bought him a pair of shoes."

Another recent Pickle winner, while crossing the parking lot after work, saw a new father struggling to install an infant car seat in his vehicle. She stopped to help with

the installation and explained how to properly use the seat to transport his newborn home safely.

Exemplifying the internal community-building value of teamwork shared by the hospital and the Pickle program, entire departments are sometimes recognized for their service. When a mother was admitted to the Maternal Care Department in pre-term labor, the unexpected timing meant that she'd miss a scheduled maternity photo shoot. Says Sellers, "The department staff worked together to make a backdrop, brought in a camera, and did the photo session before the patient delivered."

TOUCHING HEARTS AND MINDS BEYOND HOSPITAL WALLS

According to Pumphrey, the Pickle program has spread far beyond Jackson Hospital, producing positive and inspirational results.

“Back in 2012, our patient experience scores were not what we wanted them to be, and the hospital’s reputation within the community was not a favorable one. But we implemented the Pickle program, and we began to see things change. As it transformed the culture of the hospital, the community really took notice.”

Soon, hospital representatives were asked to make presentations about the Pickle program to community organizations. “We also hosted a chaplains’ group,” Pumphrey says. “We required them to go through the Pickle training just as we required our employees to do.”

Word spread quickly through local churches and civic groups. “People were talking about the Pickle program and what we were doing here,” she continues. “It transformed the hospital’s reputation within the community to a very favorable one.”

So favorable, in fact, that an anonymous donor—inspired by the power of the Pickle program’s effects on the hospital, its staff and patients—made a generous donation through Jackson Hospital’s foundation, stipulating that the funds be used specifically to perpetuate the Pickle program. The interest earned by that donation has boosted the amount of Pickle of the Year winners’ financial awards from \$250 to about \$500.



Jackson Hospital Employee of the year Tina Paulk, RN, and CEO Jim Platt. Paulk works in the hospital's Emergency Department.

Anticipating A Future Full of Pickles

Although new viewers of Media Partners' Give 'em the PICKLE! might consider the long-established program's look to be somewhat vintage, the training remains among the company's most popular, and its core messages about the value of customer service are timeless.

Accordingly, Pumphrey and Sellers see the Pickle philosophy continuing to drive Jackson Hospital's culture and its dedication to patient experience. "We think it's a great program," Pumphrey says. "When we started it here, the hospital had tried other programs, but those fizzled. A few critics predicted the same for the Pickle program. Instead, we have seen great success with it."

THE TWO SECRETS TO PICKLE SUCCESS

Pumphrey attributes that success to the approach taken by the Jackson Hospital team. "What is important is that we have made the program our own. We adjusted it and transformed it into something that fit our organization. It is not a cookie-cutter kind of training. When you make it yours, you can really achieve success." There were a couple of keys to that adaptation.

First, says Pumphrey, "We made it mandatory education. We got directors involved and did role-playing. We provided examples of desired customer service behaviors. We went further by having a Skills Day event every year where we had a booth devoted to patient experience and emphasized the Pickle program."

Ownership proved to be the other secret to success. "We got the Employee Leadership Committee involved, too, and then handed the program over to them," Pumphrey explains.

"They started reviewing the index cards every month, recognizing their coworkers, and driving patient and staff recognition of outstanding

customer service. Then they developed the luncheon. They choose the menu, set it up, and serve the Pickle nominees. Administration stepped back and empowered our employees to own the program. That has made it a success."

Sellers echoes that idea, adding that Jackson Hospital's patient experience scores continue in the top percentile. "Through consistent application of the Pickle program and its ownership by employees, we've seen an amazing transformation—and not only in the hospital's culture. Our community has really embraced what we're doing here, and we're very proud of that. We believe that if we continue to provide the best patient experience, people will choose Jackson Hospital when they need healthcare services. We're definitely a growing facility, so we believe that connection is working."

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About Media Partners

Media Partners addresses the most critical people skills issues to ensure employees feel respected, safe and engaged in their work environment. Our award-winning training content helps organizations build better workplaces, resulting in improved employee retention, productivity, and performance. Our programs include well-known titles such as: *Once & For All: Stopping Sexual Harassment at Work* and *How Was Your Day? Getting Real about Bias, Inclusion, Harassment and Bullying*.

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