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Providing Customized Services

Concierge services put patients' and employees' minds at ease.

Keeping the patient happy—even if it means thinking outside the traditional hospital framework—is exactly what St. John Health, based in Detroit, set out to do. In April 2006, St. John launched a concierge service, called REAL Convenience, to make life easier for workers and patients alike.

St. John's vision statement, "Together we deliver the highest quality patient care experience, everyday, everywhere, for everyone," means we aim to treat the whole person. Providing exceptional service is part of the patient experience.

If "concierge service" sounds like something only a hospital executive could afford, it is not. REAL Convenience is designed for everyone: lab technicians, nurses, volunteers, doctors, patients, cafeteria workers, line managers, executive-level staff and more. St. John's size, comprising eight hospitals and more than 125 medical facilities and employing some 18,000 associates, including 3,500 physicians, actually supports an on-site coordinator for the services.

There is no charge for employees to join REAL Convenience. The system pays an annual fee for services to be provided. The service, provided by our partner, Errand Solutions LLC, works with the various providers to ensure

that their prices are the same as, or in some cases lower than, if the individuals ran the errands themselves. "On average we save our users about 16 hours a month," says Marsha McVicker, Errand Solutions CEO. "The vendor does all the running around and we never mark up our services to the end user. We want everyone to be able to use this and feel comfortable."

Associates might use the concierge service to get their oil changed, purchase movie tickets or obtain help planning an event—tasks that cannot always be done when working hectic hours in an already jam-packed life.

We have been pleased with REAL Convenience, especially working with the on-site coordinator. Our associates consider the concierge service one of their top five best benefits. Most often they take advantage of services such as dog walking, dry cleaning, oil changes and travel plans. The most popular requests have been for research related to travel arrangements, evening events and daycare. Employees also arrange for birthday cards to be mailed and documents to be faxed. During the holiday season, gifts are wrapped for free.

As of August 2006, 36 percent of our associates had participated in the

program. We are striving to reach 50 percent by the end of the year. For those who are enrolled, they are assured that whatever the request, arrangements are made to get it done. For example, one of our associates needed his car towed for repair. His situation was particularly difficult because the car was parked on the top floor of a steep parking garage and he was in need of the tow on the weekend to get to work. The service not only arranged for the tow, but helped guide the car out of the lot. The associate was thrilled and even wrote a note saying how grateful he was.

While the service has been a hit with associates, St. John is expanding it so that patients can take advantage of the program. Now when patients check in to a St. John hospital for an extended or unexpected stay, they receive an administrative welcome kit that includes an in-room visit and introduction to the concierge services.

And our patients are reaping the benefits already. For example, a patient who was being discharged later in the day requested help getting his prescriptions filled before he left. The REAL Convenience on-site coordinator went to the patient's room, picked up his prescriptions, insurance card and debit card, and took them to the pharmacy

to fulfill the request. When the coordinator returned to the pharmacy to pick up the prescriptions, she was told that the order could not be completed because of conflicts with the prescriptions. To ensure that the patient had what he needed prior to his discharge, the coordinator asked if the pharmacist would resolve the issues with doctors over the phone. The patient was very appreciative when the coordinator came back with the appropriate medicines.

Our biggest challenge has been getting the word out to everyone—patients in particular—now that the concierge service is in place. St. John is hoping that participants soon will not be able to imagine life without it.

REAL Convenience allows our associates to have more free time—time not having to be dedicated to tasks—and our patients to worry less about things they need to get done while in the hospital. They can focus on getting well and not worry about their dog being cared for or having groceries in the house for their family. The idea seems to be catching on, and we encourage other organizations to have some sort of concierge service in place, whether it is outsourced or part of the company's infrastructure. Remember, exceptional service is part of the patient experience. ▲

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