



10th Floor Turnaround

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Florissant resident McKinley Lane, 80, has been a patient at Christian Hospital three times in the past few years. But during his most recent visit to the hospital, he discovered some changes that knocked his socks off.

"I've only seen this kind of treatment in movies," Lane said.

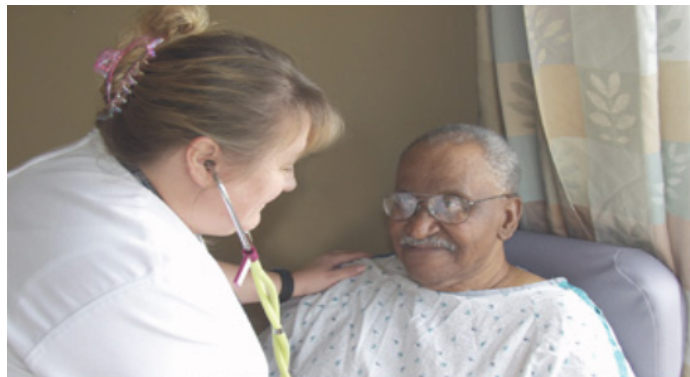
"They (staff) all stop in to check to see if I'm OK all the time. They're not just in and out they actually spend time to talk. One lady came in to help me, and she asked if she could wash my back.

"Imagine that. I've never seen anything like this."

Private rooms, cell phones, computers on wheels and an overall desire to improve patients' hospital experiences have turned routines upside down on Christian Hospital's 10th floor.

Hospital officials said the changes reduce most hospital stays by half a day, improve patient satisfaction and renew staff morale.

The 10th floor changes are the first of a floor-by-floor hospital makeover. The changes are intended to create a healing environment where maximum recovery can take place in the shortest possible period of time.



The changes also are supposed to improve communication and reduce stress for patients and their loved ones, and allow patients to be involved in their own medical care.

Susan Issenberg, director of the hospital's transformation initiative, described what could be called "a perfect storm" of circumstances that created a need for serious changes.

"At one time this hospital was the jewel of North County," Issenberg said. "But then we began to decline. Patients and their families were choosing other hospitals, physicians were taking their practices elsewhere, and nurses and other employees were leaving. We began to experience financial difficulties. Serious changes were in order.

"Improving the patient's hospital stay was our goal."

Issenberg said they chose the 10th floor to begin the makeover because it serves a mix of medical, neurosurgical and orthopedic patients.



She believes ripples from the changes created on the 10th floor will move through the entire hospital to food service, housekeeping, emergency services and other areas important to patients.

Registered nurse Joan Frazee supervises the nurses on the 10th floor. She said the changes also have had a significant affect on nurses' morale.

"We work not only for a paycheck but also for perks that come when patients are satisfied," Frazee said. "We're happier doing better work. When we can't meet patients' needs we get upset. We have shed more tears than we care to admit."

Team coordinator Barb Murphy said the team built the project from the ground up.

"We began a 90-day process by researching best practices in medical care, using information gathered from community focus groups and from patients and families themselves," she said.

The team also traveled to hospitals around the country that have achieved the goal Christian Hospital is working toward.

Then the team drew up a blueprint for change that would meet patients needs. With hospital administrators' support, they uprooted long-established routines followed not just by Christian Hospital, but by the majority of hospitals in the nation.

"When patients are in the hospital, they are at their most vulnerable," registered nurse Amy Rainey said. "We see that they get frustrated when they need a nurse and we can't respond immediately."

Nurses' now have pocket phones with phone numbers listed on communication boards in every room that enable patients to speak with nurses without delay.

"We can answer patients' questions directly," Rainey said. "If we're tied up at another bedside, we can tell the patient that we'll be at their bedside within a few minutes."

The phones themselves have eliminated a seemingly unending string of names heard over hospital loudspeakers all day and all through the night, sometimes disturbing patients' sleep.

While the changes have made a big difference to patients, some areas still might need a bit of improvement.

"(The staff) come in so often," Lane said with a laugh, "they wake me up to ask if everything was all right."

Staff members are in charge of fulfilling patients' requests, helping to eliminate the anxiety patients feel when their requests go ignored.

Another change allows patients to be more active in their own medical care. Patients receive individual information on what to expect during their stay, are briefed on their medical progress and have access to their own medical charts.

A family member or significant other receives a personal badge that gives them 24/7 access and in-depth information on their loved one's progress.

Computers on wheels allow nurses to chart information at the patient's bedside rather than at the nurses' station. The change saves valuable minutes that can be used for patient care and also reduces the miles nurses walk each day.

"Even the doctor smiles," Lane said of his latest hospital experience. "He explained every detail to me. He wasn't in a hurry. It was like a fireside conversation you'd have with a friend."

"I didn't expect this kind of treatment. If they keep this up, they'll have patients coming in from all over the state."

