



# COMPASSION IN HEALTH CARE

A family crisis illustrates why security can, and should, be about so much more than protection

By Martin Green

I first started working in health-care security in 1985.

A hospital was the absolute last place in the world that I ever thought I would work.

They are usually horrible places. No one is ever happy to come to a hospital unless they are having a baby or visiting one. For everyone else, hospitals contribute to unhappy memories. Sometimes people come to a hospital to see someone for the last time and to say goodbye to them.

In 35 years, I have changed my perspective, including my dread about coming to work in a hospital. I have learned to love working in health care and I have thrived. But nothing prepared me for what happened to my family last September.

“My son almost died.” That’s the worst thing that I have ever told anyone. Ever! As a health-care security professional I have heard lots of people say that, but it was never me. I have transported hundreds of bodies in and out of morgues, witnessed probably thousands of individuals deal with grief, fear and loss. But it was never me.

My son is only 32 and had never

had a health issue in his life before this.

It started on a Friday morning. I received a phone call at work that my oldest son (who lives in the suburbs of Chicago) had been rushed to a hospital. There were no details, just the name of the hospital. I tried calling the hospital, but was unable to get any information from the emergency department.



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They promised that someone would call me back when they could. I waited. I was having a meeting in my office with one of our nurse managers at the time and she

said, “Why are you still here? You should leave.” But I had no details, other than that he was in hospital. There was no point in leaving, especially since he was in Chicago. What could I do?

About 20 minutes later, I received a call from the doctor in the emergency department with details. My son had been found by his room-mate convulsing on the living room floor. He had vomited and was aspirating the vomit. The room-mate had rolled him over into the recovery position, most likely saving his life. My son was on a respirator, in a medically-induced coma. He was in life-threatening condition.

I had no option but to immediately

book the next available flight to Chicago, rush home, grab my passport and pack a bag. As I waited for my flight, while I was in the air, and as I was driving to the hospital terrible thoughts were going through my mind. Was my son going to die? Was I going to have to plan a funeral and bury my son? How do you get a body across the border? What am I going to do with all of his assets? What if he survived but was now disabled? For the first time in ages, I prayed, and I sent a Tweet asking others to do the same.

It was the worst time of my life. For almost four days, I lived at his bedside, barely sleeping. He was young and strong and in good health. He fought, we fought, the doctors fought and he recovered. After being admitted to the hospital in critical condition on a Friday, he was discharged the following Thursday. There were a few after effects. He was tired and weak and needed time to rest, but he was healthy and alive. As I write this, he has made a complete and full recovery.

Throughout this entire ordeal, there was something that I noticed. I saw the power of customer service in action. Every single person that I interacted with at the hospital — whether they were a doctor, a nurse, a cleaner or a security guard — displayed exceptional customer service. This experience demonstrated to me, more than ever, what health-care security is all about. It gave me a fresh perspective and a renewed commitment

to ensuring that my health-care facility is as safe as it can possibly be, but also to ensure that all of my staff are trained to the highest standard for customer service.

Typically in a health-care security training program, we concentrate on concepts related to use of force, liability, risk management, emergency code response, report-writing, patrol, workplace violence, security-sensitive areas and other typical health-care security issues. But do we provide enough training in customer service? Do we stress the importance of customer service?

There are several books and programs in the health-care world that discuss customer service. Many health-care leaders have read the bestselling book, "If Disney ran your hospital" by author Fred Lee, published in 2004. He describes the concept of making a visit to a health-care facility as pleasurable as visiting a Disney theme park. Other hospital leaders have a variety of different models. At my hospital we utilize the AIDET (Acknowledge, Introduce, Duration, Explanation and Thank you) program.

This seems very simplistic and in some cases unrealistic. But it works. I have seen it and experienced it first-hand. As mentioned earlier, people are afraid in a hospital; they are dealing with stress, fear and grief. They don't want to interact with a security guard at the best of times, but certainly never with a bad-tempered, rude or unhelpful one.

As we move forward with our advances in health-care security training, we must focus on the importance of customer service. Security personnel are normally the most recognizable employees in any health-care facility. We are commonly the only staff who wear a uniform that clearly indicates what department we work in and what service we provide. People come to us for help and directions.

Using the principles of AIDET, we need to teach and train our staff to:

- Acknowledge the person/people that they are speaking to. Security guards need to stop and take the time to let the person know that they have been seen and that they will be helped. Your security staff


needs to make eye contact, smile and acknowledge family or friends in the room.

- Introduce themselves to the people they are interacting with. It doesn't have to be complicated, just a simple "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_ and I'm with security, how can I help you?"
- Duration: Tell your visitors how long it will take to help them or how long they will have to wait.
- Explain step-by-step what they can expect next, answer questions and let the client/co-worker know how to contact you.
- Thank the client, family or co-worker for their time, patience and co-operation.

I have witnessed and experienced first-hand how this approach can make people feel at ease and more comfortable when they interact with a member of the security team.

The first and most important step in the Use of Force continuum is Officer Presence. Security guards often have an intimidating presence. There are occasions where that can be useful, but more often than not, it can lead to increased tension. A friendly, welcoming approach will often have a very positive result.

Over the years, I have learned to practice the AIDET approach when I deal with the public. When a security guard needs to have what could potentially be a negative interaction with a member of the public, it can be made easier by the approach and demeanor of the guard. A tempered and restrained approach can often lead to a reduction in tension and agitation.

Customer service is perhaps the most important role that a security guard can offer to their health-care facility. A customer service approach to security can only benefit your health-care organization. I have seen it work and after my recent experience with my son, I now have an even better understanding of how important and impactful it can be. 

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