

HCS 281a: Customer Service in Health IT

In this course, you will develop customer service skills to communicate effectively across a team. You will also be introduced to roles that will be encountered in healthcare and public health settings.

≡ Key Elements of Customer Service in Health IT

≡ Flash Cards

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❓ Practice Quiz

Key Elements of Customer Service in Health IT

Customer service is integral to healthcare and health IT. The HIT professional has many different types of customers, including the physician, nurse, healthcare organization (HCO) manager, administrator, and staff. On occasion, HIT professionals may directly serve patients, their families, and the public. HIT professionals often interact with external customers, such as vendors, other HCOs, government entities, public health entities, and regulators as well as third-party payers such as Medicare and other insurance carriers. Each HIT customer has specific needs that vary depending on the professional concern of the individual or entity being served.

What is Customer Service?

The customer is the purchaser of commodity or service. Service is the work performed by someone who serves.

According to *Dictionary.com*, customer service is "assistance and other resources that a company provides to the people who buy or use its products or services." [1] Customer Service can be good, adequate, or bad.

GOODSERVICE	ADEQUATESERVICE	BADSERVICE
Good service that leaves the customer happy or satisfied with the experience.		

Image credit: Articulate Content Library, used with permission.

Image Alt-tag: Women with short red hair with a headset and mic.



GOODSERVICE

ADEQUATESERVICE

BADSERVICE

Adequate service where the courtesy or assistance provided to the customer is just average — the customer's needs are met, but the experience was neither memorable nor favorable.

Image credit: Articulate Content Library, used with permission.



GOODSERVICE

ADEQUATESERVICE

BADSERVICE

Bad or poor service—to an HCO, the repercussions of poor customer service may mean a loss of revenue, profit, or market share.

Image credit: Articulate Content Library, used with permission.



Good customer service saves time and money that would otherwise be spent trying to alter the discontented customer's attitude after a bad experience.

Service Culture

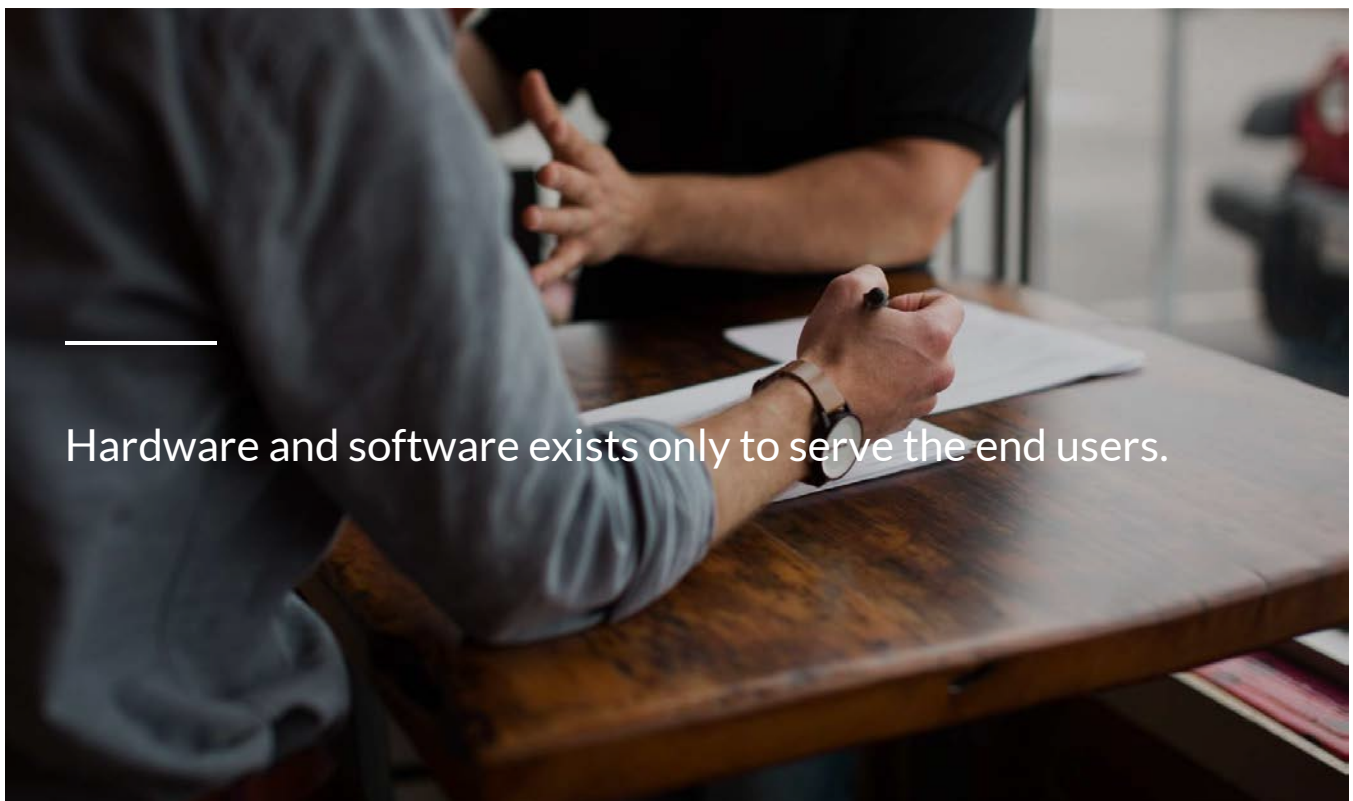
The purpose of healthcare is to provide a service to patients and their families. The HCO must strive to maintain a culture of service both internally and externally. HIT professionals perform a service and therefore must be concerned with what constitutes good customer service in the healthcare arena.

The mission of an HIT professional is to support systems and applications that are purchased, implemented, integrated, and/or maintained for HCO internal customers, including managers, administrators, clinicians, and staff. These customers use HIT systems and services to deliver healthcare to patients.

HIT professionals sometimes create software, which is a tangible product. However, even this effort is on behalf of the end users who use the HIT system. Without the end users, health IT would have no purpose, so in all their efforts, HIT professionals act in a service capacity.

HIT professionals also interact with vendors who supply system products and services. In this capacity, HIT professionals are the vendor's customer, but even in the customer role, they must act on behalf of the HIT system users who ultimately use the services provided by the vendor.

HIT professionals wear many hats, but in every one of their different roles, they must maintain an attitude and demeanor appropriate to professional customer service.



Hardware and software exists only to serve the end users.

Image Alt-tag: Mans arm on a desk. He has a watch on and holding a pen as if to write on the paper in front of him.

Image credit: Articulate Content Library, used with permission.

Knowledge Check

Watch this scenario, then click continue to answer the question that follows. Srinivas, the helpdesk support specialist, is representing HIT customer support in this scenario. Mike, the pharmacist, is the customer.

The AC Hospital pharmacist, Mike, is upset and concerned because the pharmaceutical database is not up to date. Which of these responses should Srinivas, the helpdesk analyst, choose to represent good HIT customer service and address Mike's concerns appropriately?

"Mike, I know you are concerned, and so am I. HIT support will look into it immediately, and I know they will give this issue their full attention."

"Don't worry, Mike. HIT support has you covered. We'll contact that outside vendor and find out what happened."

"We know how important you are down there in pharmacy. Don't worry, we'll make this a priority."

"Mike, you know we depend on that outside vendor for updates, and I guess they messed up. I'll turn this over to HIT support, but I know they will give the problem immediate attention."

Who Are the HIT Customers?

Defining what constitutes good customer service in health IT is complicated because it seems everyone in healthcare is a customer.

Hospitals

Hospitals can be the most complex of HIT customers. Most hospitals have enterprisewide systems as well as separate systems for internal specialized departments such as laboratory, radiology, and pharmacy. Each of these systems generates medical information used by clinicians across the hospital to make diagnostic and treatment decisions about patient care.

Hospitals also have enterprisewide systems that support communication such as email and Internet access. With increasing frequency, hospitals maintain an enterprisewide EHR system where all aspects of patient care are recorded and made accessible to clinicians for diagnosis and treatment of patients. The EHR system must be interoperable with the separate internal specialty systems.

Communication with, and sometimes the exchange of data with, external vendors and other healthcare, regulatory, and public health entities is also necessary to fully support the hospital's HIT requirements.

Image credit: Articulate Content Library, used with permission.

Image Alt-tag: An operating room in a hospital.



Clinics

A physician-run clinic is similar to a hospital in that its employees depend on information technology to facilitate its many day-to-day processes such as producing a day's worth of billing, automatic and electronic querying of insurance eligibility, and scheduling patients for the day. Also, like hospitals, the clinic may have an enterprisewide EHR system where all aspects of patient care are recorded and made accessible to clinicians for diagnosis and treatment of patients.

Some clinics may also have their own website or portal where patients can enter their insurance information and health history prior to coming to the clinic for their visit.

Image credit: Articulate Content Library, used with permission.

Image Alt-tag: A nurse manually taking the blood pressure of a patient.



Clinicians

Sometimes physicians and nurses work for a hospital and use the hospital's systems. If so, they are key HIT customers because their use of the EHR and other ancillary systems is for purposes of patient healthcare delivery.

Many physicians maintain their own practice to provide outpatient primary or specialty care. The HITECH Act has influenced physicians to install EHR systems in their private practice offices. Allied health professionals address critical care, diagnostic and therapeutic sciences, health services administration, nutrition sciences, occupational therapy, and physical therapy.

As in a hospital setting, physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals in private practices are key HIT customers because they use the systems to provide direct patient care.

Image credit: Articulate Content Library, used with permission.

Image Alt-tag: A doctor dressed for surgery.



HCO Administrators, Professionals, and Staff

Although meaningful use incentives are primarily aimed at physicians, staff supports the physicians in their patient-care efforts. Health information management (HIM) professionals and ancillary service providers such as laboratory and radiology professionals are HIT customers because their workflow is directly affected by health IT, and they are likely to become end users of the EHR systems.

In addition to the staff members who work so closely with the physicians and nurses, there is a host of administrative staff members at hospitals and within all other HCO facilities that keep the patients moving appropriately from place to place and the business records updated and current. Some administrative users, such as finance and billing, have their own IT systems. However, their record source is the EHR, so they must be considered HIT customers.

Image credit: Articulate Content Library, used with permission.

Image Alt-tag: A woman sitting at a desk in front of a laptop taking notes.



Regulatory Agencies

HIT professionals also serve regulatory agencies, including state licensing boards and The Joint Commission in their efforts to license and audit HCOs for patient care, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and other insurance carriers, and public health agencies.

Regulatory agencies often ask for highly structured data and reports such as patient care statistics, quality measures, and/or billing information.

Image credit: Articulate Content Library, used with permission.

Image Alt-tag: A building that is a clinic.



Patients and the Public

Patients and the general public should be considered direct and indirect customers of health IT. As direct customers, HIT patient Web portals provide access to relevant portions of the patient health records such as immunization and medication schedules or future or past appointments.

The notion of patients as healthcare consumers is relatively new, but new social media technologies make it easy for patients to share or rate their perceived level of customer service from a physician or hospital, which makes them direct recipients of HIT services.

Indirectly, patients and the public benefit from the growth in adoption of EHR systems because the data contained in the EHR enables capabilities such as patient portals to exist. Also, as healthcare data accumulates and is shared across health information exchange networks and through healthcare data banks, medicine itself will be impacted with direct and indirect benefits to the public at large.

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What Do HIT Customers Want?

In the healthcare arena, it is important to ask what the customer wants. Services provided by the HIT professional vary by the particular customer being served. Some basic commonalities exist in HIT customer needs:

All customers want adequate privacy and security protections as well as on-demand EHR system and data access. Clinical end users expect to be fully engaged in the HIT system implementation decision-making process. Consultant, vendor, or other external or temporary staff must be considered, particularly if they are direct caregivers and if they provide services associated with or use data taken from the EHR.

Meetings with HIT customers may need to be scheduled and rescheduled at the clinicians' convenience. Physicians and nurses are engaged in treating patients, and that sometimes means life or death. HIT professionals must be flexible and realize that access to clinical customers will often be impacted by unpredictable patient demands.

Hospital, clinic, and physician practice administrators have their own concerns with the patient community. HIT system implementation problems that become visible to the patient community, such as an apparently small problem in the billing process, could create havoc if they become visible to the patient. The costs of rectifying such mistakes can spiral out of control.

HIT professionals must attend to such a complex and myriad set of customer service requests that they cannot all be presented here or even fully anticipated. However, some customers have very specific needs that relate to their responsibility or role, including:

Physicians

Physicians can be health IT's greatest allies or biggest detractors in the implementation of EHR systems and components. One of the most important considerations with physician satisfaction is clinical autonomy, which refers to the course of treatment, tests ordered, and medications all based on the individual physician's way of treating patients. Depending on how a system is being implemented, clinical autonomy can be eroded with system-generated suggestions on different ways to perform tasks. HIT professionals must display sensitivity in discussions that affect clinical autonomy.

One meaningful strategy to avoid physician dissatisfaction is to have physicians represented in a leadership position in the HIT department as chief medical information officer. This is a fairly new position, and the physician who takes on this responsibility must be respected by the physician peer community.

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Nurses

Similar to a physician, a nurse is focused on patient care. A nurse's job, particularly in a hospital setting, is to spend time at the patients' bedsides, taking care of their needs. Nurses do not want systems or tools that take the focus off of patient care and put it on technology. Most nurses are more comfortable with support systems and technology that enable a smoother workflow or eliminate unnecessary or repetitive steps and documentation in their daily work lives.

During an EHR system implementation, nursing input is crucial in the decision-making process because they provide the greatest familiarity with workflow processes.

Image credit: Articulate Content Library, used with permission.



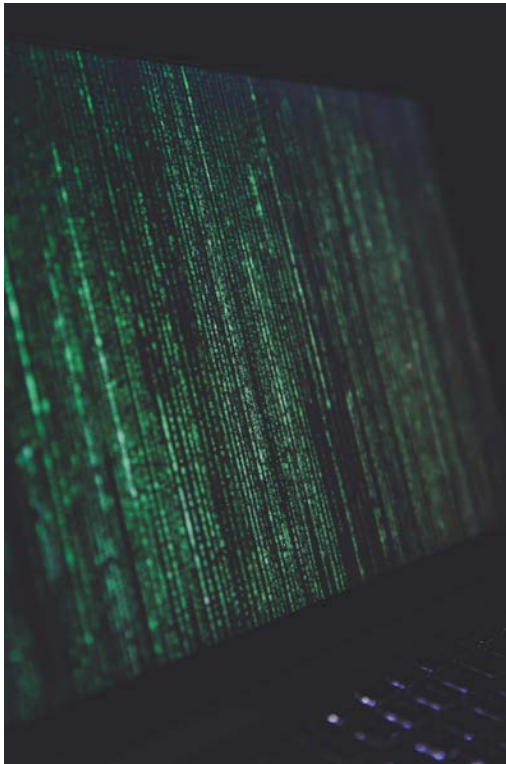
HCO Administrators

HCO administrators usually make decisions based on retrospective healthcare and business data. They want HIT systems that provide accurate and timely access to clinical, financial, and administrative information about their hospital or practice. They need a system and data access that is relatively easy to use.

HCO administrators have enormous responsibilities and do not want to spend time tinkering with and deciphering technology. They need straight answers about a system's capabilities without having to translate a lot of technical jargon.

HIT customer support for HCO administrators does not end when the contract is signed or even when the implementation is complete. Well after EHR system implementation, HIT professionals will find themselves reinforcing the value of the system to the HCO's administrators.

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Staff

Staff members need a system that supports their work processes. Workflow issues are common with EHR system implementations because the healthcare workflows are so complex and involve the nurses, physicians, allied staff, and staff of all related systems, such as laboratory and radiology.

When an EHR system is implemented, workflow is likely to change for the staff, including those involved in patient scheduling and registration, health information management (HIM; sometimes called medical records), and the billing office.

HIT professionals are wise to involve the staff in the EHR system decision-making process. Staff want to be heard and understood during the planning, analysis, and design phase, not when the implementation of the new system begins or, worse, after the system goes live.

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Patients

Strangely enough, patients are often overlooked during EHR system implementation or conversion, possibly because patients are not the primary or even secondary users of the new EHR system. However, patients are the reason for healthcare and the HCO's existence. For example, if a system go-live creates delays in service, a patient may be delayed access to a pain medication, which can be agonizing. This demonstrates just one reason that HIT professionals must be aware of patients' needs as fundamental to all EHR system implementation and maintenance efforts.

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Knowledge Check

Which of these choices is a service required and requested by all HIT customers? Select all that apply.

Security

Privacy

Admissions/registration

System availability

System/data accuracy

References/Sources

1

[1] Customer Service Definition retrieved on June 20, 2017 from_
<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/customer-service>

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Continue with other activities/quizzes...

Flash Cards

Customer

Purchaser of service or item.

1 of 6

Service

Work performed by a company
or person.

Customer Service	Assistance and other resources that a company provides to the people who buy or use its products or services,
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Healthcare Purpose	Provide a service to patients and their families.
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HIT Professional Mission

Support systems and applications that are purchased, implemented, integrated, and/or maintained for HCO internal customers, including managers, administrators, clinicians,

5 of 6

Good Customer Service

Saves time and money that would otherwise be spent trying to alter the discontented customer's attitude after a bad experience.

6 of 6

Sorting Activity

Which of these entities are direct HIT customers?

Direct HIT Customers

Hospitals	Clinics
Physician Practices	Nurses
HCO Staff	HCO Managers



Not Direct HIT Customers

System Vendors

Practice Quiz

Question

01/25

IT is technology focused represents the traditional information technology (IT) professionals' approach to their responsibilities.

True

False

Question

02/25

IT is customer focused represents the traditional information technology (IT) professionals' approach to their responsibilities.

True

False

Question

03/25

IT facilitates business goals represents the traditional information technology (IT) professionals' approach to their responsibilities.

True

False

Question

04/25

IT shares decision making with customers represents the traditional information technology (IT) professionals' approach to their responsibilities.

True

False

Question

05/25

HIT professionals are shifting focus from technology to HCO customer service and support.

True

False

Question

06/25

SLA stands for

Service level agreements

Service level association

Standard level agreements

Standard level association

Question

07/25

How many standards of levels do SLA's have?

1

2

3

4

Question

08/25

The helpdesk's SLA is likely to address all but which factors?

Calls answered

Calls resolved

Calls escalated

Calls ended

Question

09/25

The number of minutes e-prescribing was not available for hospital pharmacy use would make a good metric for measuring HIT adherence to service level agreements (SLAs) between HIT support specialists and their healthcare organization (HCO) end users?

True

False

Question

10/25

Number of failed batch data processing jobs in a week would make a good metric for measuring HIT adherence to service level agreements (SLAs) between HIT support specialists and their healthcare organization (HCO) end users?

True

False

Question

11/25

Number of helpdesk calls that were not answered by the fourth ring would make a good metric for measuring HIT adherence to service level agreements (SLAs) between HIT support specialists and their healthcare organization (HCO) end users?

True

False

Question

12/25

The number of batch data processing jobs supported by HIT support specialist would make a good metric for measuring HIT adherence to service level agreements (SLAs) between HIT support specialists and their healthcare organization (HCO) end users?

True

False

Question

18/25

HIT Team members should concentrate on ensuring they meet and measure their ability to meet stakeholders' needs in the EHR system and evaluate the system's quality is called_____.

Project

Contract

Mechanics

Scope

HIT team member should concentrate on ensuring the EHR system performs as predicted by the SLAs, problems are resolved quickly, and the system is kept up to date on a regular basis is called_____.

Project

Contract

Mechanics

Scope

Question

20/25

The healthcare organization (HCO) conducts patient satisfaction surveys to ensure that all healthcare and business efforts, including those supported by HIT support specialists, meet the patient's needs.

True

False

Emphasizing the EHR contribution to patient safety and quality of care is a method the HIT professional can use to positively influence customer perceptions of the EHR system implementation project. True or False.

True

False

Question

22/25

Demonstrate the immediate advantages of the EHR system for nurses and administrators is a method the HIT professional can use to positively influence customer perceptions of the EHR system implementation project. True or False.

True

False

Question

23/25

Identify rewards for important EHR project stakeholders is a method the HIT professional can use to positively influence customer perceptions of the EHR system implementation project. True or False.

True

False

Improve patient satisfaction through advertising EHR benefits is a method the HIT professional can use to positively influence customer perceptions of the EHR system implementation project. True or False.

True

False

Question

25/25

Successful EHR implementation requires the HIT project team to perform many complex and detailed tasks. True or False.

True

False