

those emotions. The process can range from the simple (surveys, focus groups, interviews) to the sophisticated (controlled experiments and experience mapping). The purpose is to encourage customers to probe and express their deep feelings about the service and to voice needs, concerns, or hopes that might not otherwise surface.

Open-ended prompts about common frustrations can be particularly revealing: "Describe the worst experience that you or a family member ever had when using this type of service." "If you were the CEO of this organization for a day and could make just one improvement for customers, what would it be?"

Belkin used patient focus groups to inform the design of its cancer center. For instance, breast cancer survivors who had been diagnosed or operated on at Belkin were asked how they would design the center

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if money were no object. The vast majority said it should *not* be inside the flagship hospital, which they perceived as a complex, scary, and inconvenient place. So Belkin designed a freestanding facility and located it off a major highway several miles from the hospital. The center houses all oncology and administrative staff members and provides comprehensive and coordinated care. (The health system branded its service as the Belkin Cancer Team.) The facility not only makes it easier to deliver efficient service but also offers a calming experience for patients: easy parking; serene design using soft colors, stone, wood, and natural light; and a garden visible from the infusion room. Without patient input, Belkin would have followed a consultant's recommendation to simply add a cancer wing to its hospital.

Belkin also uses experience mapping in an effort to better identify and respond to patients'

emotional triggers. (See the exhibit "Visualizing the Customer's Journey.")

### 2 Respond Early to Intense Emotions

In times of duress, the impressions left by service providers are long-lasting and can heighten the impact of a service experience, for better or worse. A failure to recognize and quickly respond to their emotional states leaves customers feeling scared, frustrated, powerless, and ignored. Here are some tactics for avoiding those feelings:

**Prepare customers for what's next.** Many high-emotion services are long-term and include numerous discrete experiences of varying intensity. Not knowing what lies ahead is a major source of anxiety for customers, who often imagine worst-case scenarios. "With cancer, there is a sense of urgency," one patient commented. "Everyone is upset when waiting for the diagnosis. As a patient, you want to know 'What's the plan?' Something is growing inside you. Let's get on with it."

Consequently, attending to customers' needs in a timely, thorough manner is crucial to moderating their emotional intensity. In many areas of the United States, newly diagnosed cancer patients have to wait several weeks or more to see various specialists and begin treatment. In stark contrast, Intermountain Healthcare offers a comprehensive set of medical appointments over the course of one day, typically within a week of the diagnosis. Patients and their families sit in one room during their "multidisciplinary clinic" day, and the members of the care team (for example, a surgeon, a medical oncologist, a radiation oncologist, a dietitian, a social worker, and a nurse "patient navigator") individually come to them. At the end of the day, patients receive a written care plan that includes scheduled appointments.

Timothy Crowley and Alex Metzger, oncologists at Martin Cancer care, a private practice outside San Francisco, stress the importance of the personal touch in the initial meeting with a patient after he or she has received the diagnosis. "Anxiety is high, and I try to get patients to take a deep breath," Crowley says. "I explain what's going on, take them through what treatments may be involved, and reassure them to the degree possible. You never want patients to feel rushed." Metzger adds, "It is really important in the first visit to establish a relationship with the patient and start a plan."

The beginning of every stage of a long-term service not just the first, can heighten emotions—so each stage is a prime opportunity for an organization to build customers' confidence. It is important to expect from each stage. Provide the information in a form customers can digest at their own pace, and repeat the most important aspects. Instill trust through transparent, reassuring communication. Prior to a patient's first chemotherapy or radiation session, the staff members of well-run cancer centers review the process step-by-step and answer questions. Ideally, the staffer who educates the patient about upcoming treatments will also administer the first one to take advantage of the established relationship. Asked about his first chemotherapy treatment, one patient recalled: "At that time, I knew what I was dealing with. I felt armed with what the nurse had taught me. I remember feeling positive and strong. Being prepared made it much better."

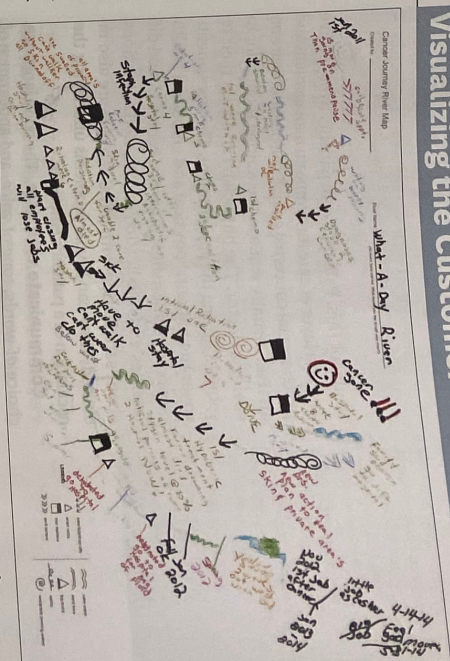
The North Shore–JLI Cancer Institute, one of the largest providers of cancer care in the New York metropolitan area, gives radiation patients and family members tours of the treatment rooms in advance. "Patients will fear the machine less if you show it to them," explains Magdalena Ryniak, the director of patient care services for radiation medicine.

Another critical phase that requires preparation is the end of treatment, which may generate a mixture of relief and deep anxiety. Even patients whose cancer is in remission may be emotionally challenged by the fear of recurrence, the impending loss of their medical support network, and, possibly, the stigma (real or imagined) of having cancer. Many progressive cancer centers offer formal survivorship programs, which in 2015 became an accreditation standard of the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer.

Belkin was an early adopter. At the end of treatment, its patients meet with a nurse practitioner who specializes in cancer aftercare. "The end of treatment is a teachable moment," says Patric Marquardt, a nurse who administers the program. "Patients say, 'I've survived this. I got through it. How do I stay healthy?'" Patients receive take-home information summarizing their treatments, symptoms of recurrence, when to seek medical help, ways to manage physical changes, and fitness planning. Their primary-care physicians also receive the summaries.

**Monitor for emotional spikes.** Predicting exactly when a customer's emotions will intensify

## Visualizing the Customer's Journey



Capturing customers' full emotional processes is challenging. Belkin Health uses an innovative technique from The Karma Group called RiverMapping to better understand its patients' cancer journeys. Patients receive detailed instructions on how to draw a map of the twists, turns, obstacles, turbulence, and smooth waters they experience.

The gynecologic oncology patient who created the RiverMap shown here drew rapids to express the stress of waiting for biopsy results and coping with skin damage from radiation treatment. She drew more-violent rapids to represent a meeting with new doctors to plan skin treatment after evidence that her cancer was gone—a surprise that prompted Belkin's staff to probe why she felt this way.

is often impossible. Spotting spikes requires monitoring. They can occur for any number of reasons: surges in pain, severe side effects from medication, changes in physical appearance due to the disease or to treatment, family-related stress (from having to tell children that their father has cancer, for example), financial pressure (even for patients with health insurance, who may be unable to work or whose insurance may not cover a certain prescribed drug), and "bad news" days, such as when the patient learns that the cancer has spread.

Progressive cancer centers periodically administer comprehensive assessments to keep tabs on their patients' physical and emotional states. Mayo Clinic's Phoenix campus was among the first to use