Customer Service Quality Improvement Tool for Family PACT Providers

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Prepared For
California Department of Public Health,
Office of Family Planning
Family PACT Technical Assistance and Training Program
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Developed By
CHT Resource Group under a subcontract with the California Family Health Council
Introduction

The “Customer Service Quality Improvement Tool for Family PACT Providers” is designed to present information about what’s important to clients who access medical care and what providers and staff can do to deliver excellent customer service. The Tool includes information from the literature about why customer service is important, how it’s defined and examples of good customer service practices. Finally, this document includes a Customer Service Checklist assessment tool that providers can use to review their organization’s current policies, procedures and practices regarding customer service and identify areas for improvement and a Personal Evaluation Form that assesses staff customer service practices and identifies areas for enhancing training and support.

Why Is Good Customer Service Important?

Providing good customer service assists both Family PACT providers and their clients. If the Family PACT services and staff members are respectful and responsive to a client’s health needs, beliefs and values, clients will feel more comfortable and satisfied. If clients are more comfortable and satisfied with the services and providers, they are likely to return for future services. These same clients are also likely to recommend services to others in the community, making your agency more accessible to new clients. Researchers believe 88.2% of consumers choose health care based on word of mouth. A satisfied client tells 3-5 people and an unhappy person tells 11-20 people.¹

Good customer service will also improve your communication with your clients which will lead to better health outcomes and adherence to your medical advice. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of those who don’t return to a health facility indicate they were dissatisfied with how they were treated. (Leebov)

Satisfying your clients will make your work more rewarding and foster the success of your organization. Customer service is not an “extra” – it is an essential requirement for providing high quality health care.

Who Are Your Customers?

There are both internal and external customers in each Family PACT organization. Internal customers are the managers, physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, health educators, billers, front office, and other colleagues that we interact within our own organization. If employees and colleagues aren’t treated with good customer service, it will be more difficult for those staff to provide good customer service to their Family PACT clients. Unhappy, dissatisfied staff are much less able to provide friendly, responsive services to their clients.

External customers are the Family PACT clients, pharmacies, laboratories and other health care organizations with which you do business. They expect and deserve excellent customer service and will seek services elsewhere if they are dissatisfied.

Many of the suggestions for good external customer service also apply to internal customers like staff and colleagues. As you review this tool that focuses mostly on your largest external customer group, your Family PACT clients, keep in mind what suggestions apply to internal customers as well.

What Are Your Client’s Expectations?

Clients judge the quality of customer service against their expectations. The following literature overview provides some key insights into client’s expectations:

1. **Communication problems** are the most frequently cited sources of dissatisfaction for women.2

2. **Waiting time has a strong impact on satisfaction**; longer waits resulted in dissatisfaction.3 Age seems to have an effect on client satisfaction with younger women being more concerned with quick services and older women focusing on the quality of their care. (Scholle, et. al.).

3. **Privacy and confidentiality are particularly important** to clients receiving reproductive health care (Scholle, et. al.).

4. Clients evaluate medical practice in six dimensions: **medical expertise, environment, people skills, systems, amenities, and affordability**.4
   a. Medical expertise - examination skills of clinicians
   b. Environment – how the facility looks
   c. People skills - staff show concern and communicate effectively
   d. Systems - phones, appointment accessibility, registration procedure, etc.
   e. Amenities - child’s play area or free samples
   f. Affordability - financial and emotional costs

It is important to think about overall satisfaction which includes both clinical care and personal customer service.

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Patients who feel they are getting good clinical care, but bad customer service, still tend to rate their overall satisfaction as low. – Pascoe, 1984

Elements of Good Customer Service

Since we know our biggest customer group, our Family PACT clients, has expectations that affect their satisfaction with our services, what should we do to meet those expectations? This section discusses specific ideas for meeting client expectations and includes additional information on good communication approaches. Suggestions for responding to clients who are dissatisfied are highlighted as well as the importance of an organizational commitment to excellent customer service.

1. **Meet and exceed customer expectations**

Know your client’s challenges, needs and expectations, and then don't just meet them, exceed them. Make your clinic/practice and its services responsive to what’s important to your clients. Here are some specific suggestions.

- **Medical expertise**
  - Providers with excellent knowledge and exam skills
  - Up-to-date treatments and technology

- **Environment**
  - Space that is clean, uncluttered, and in good repair
  - Space that is accessible and in safe surroundings
  - Weekend or evening hours for working clients
  - Teen and male friendly

- **People skills**
  - Friendly, knowledgeable, trained staff providing services
  - Staff with excellent communication skills (see Section 2 below on communication)
  - Staff responsive to Limited English Proficient (LEP) clients
    - Medical interpreters or interpretation services
    - Translated materials, particularly educational brochures, consent forms, and medication information
  - Process in place to answer client’s questions and concerns

- **Systems and Timeliness**
  - Short interval between calling for an appointment and getting in for care
  - Phones answered quickly and consistently
  - Easy to navigate systems including enrollment and stops during the visit
  - Short waiting times while in the facility
  - Test results reported quickly
2. **Communicate is key!**

Two-thirds of all customers who are dissatisfied are not unhappy because of the quality of service or cost, but because of poor communication with providers and other staff. Effective communication skills include a warm greeting, smiling, handshakes, good eye contact, asking open-ended questions and listening actively to a client’s responses and concerns. Additionally, communicating in a culturally and linguistically sensitive way is essential. (See the Cultural and Linguistic Competency Toolkit on the Family PACT website for guidance).

Here are some tips on showing that you care:

**a. Answering phones**
- Answer promptly
- Ask permission before putting a client on hold
- Ask if the client would prefer a call back rather than holding
- Keep tone friendly and informative

**b. Greet clients throughout the visit**
- Acknowledge their arrival
- Make eye contact
- Use a positive, sincere tone of voice
- Smile and greet client warmly

**c. Be available and responsive**
- Let the client know you are there to help
- Notice when someone needs help and provide it
- If in doubt, ask what the client needs or wants

**d. Listen and demonstrate a caring attitude**
- Use body language that demonstrates listening
- Ask open-ended questions (“Tell me about….”, or “What can we help you with today?”)
- Repeat back what you have heard for confirmation
- Acknowledge feelings (“I can really understand how frustrated you must be after waiting this long.”)
e. **Provide whatever help you can**
   - Put yourself in the other person’s shoes – “How would I want to be treated in this situation?”
   - Do whatever you can to solve a problem – take responsibility
   - If you do not have an answer – find it

f. **Show respect and appreciation**
   - Respect people’s time by acknowledging the inconvenience of long waits
   - Always explain what is happening and why
   - Let clients know if there is a delay and offer options to re-schedule a visit whenever possible
   - Thank people for their patience, cooperation, and understanding

3. **Special communication considerations**

   Even the most dedicated healthcare team will have customer problems occasionally. Many clients will be emotional even when there is no “complaint”. Some of the reasons clients may be emotional when they visit your facility include that they:
   - Are tired or frustrated
   - Are confused or overwhelmed
   - Are under the influence of drugs or alcohol
   - Have challenges with the language
   - Are in a hurry and have had to wait
   - Have never been in a similar situation before

   Also, look for body language signs that clients are emotional or dissatisfied (loud sighs, clearly upset, angry or sad, etc.). Don’t avoid these clients, but listen and demonstrate a caring attitude and provide whatever help you can.

   Lastly, if the client is angry or demanding it’s usually a defense to protect vulnerability such as fear, insecurity, guilt or anxiety. The provider and staff should respond to these clients by:
   - Remaining calm
   - Not taking it personally
   - Being attentive, and maintaining eye contact
   - Using active listening techniques
   - Allowing the person to vent and not interrupting
   - Giving a statement of sincere regret or apology and avoiding excuses
     - Examples - “I can certainly understand why you’re upset.” “Your frustration is very understandable.” “I’m really sorry that happened.”
   - Suggesting possible solutions
   - Taking some sort of action, if this is what the client wants
   - Following up whenever possible.
4. **Make customer service an explicit organizational value**

Providing good customer service is a reflection of the organization’s behavior, as well as of each individual who works there. It is important to create a service culture that both your employees and customers can respect. Include a commitment to customer service by including customer service in the organization’s mission or value statements, administrative handbooks, and/or protocols. Also, it is equally important to hold providers and managers accountable for being role models of good customer service.

Make customer service expectations a critical and stated component of job descriptions and performance evaluations. Management should discuss good customer service with staff at orientations, staff development workshops, and staff meetings on an on-going basis. In addition, provide training and support for staff in areas that impact customer service such as stress management, problem solving, and communication skills targeted for special populations such as Limited English Proficient (LEPs), adolescents, and male clients.

Evaluate employees’ customer service performance by conducting chart reviews to see if employees are following protocols and/or observing staff interactions with clients (done by supervisors and/or peers). Be sure both good and bad customer service is reviewed and discussed during performance reviews with employees. Lastly, require improvement by employees if necessary including training on customer service and follow-up on behaviors and reward staff for good customer service.

5. **Ask customer and employees if they are satisfied**

Organizations should survey their customers and their staff about their satisfaction. Systems should be in place for customers and staff to give feedback through focus groups, consumer/staff advisory boards, questionnaires, staff or client comment cards or suggestion boxes.

Client satisfaction surveys should not try to cover all the client expectations in one document. Separate surveys on expectations and satisfaction about medical expertise, the environment, staff communication skills, etc. should be used. For each survey ask the client’s rating on the particular aspect of the visit and his/her expectation for that aspect of the visit (e.g., how important is this to the client). For example, if you’re assessing the clinic environment ask:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important is it to you, that:</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Nice but not Necessary</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The clinic is in good condition.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How would you rate</strong></td>
<td>Lousy</td>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>Okay</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cleanliness of the clinic</td>
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<tr>
<td>The condition of the building</td>
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<td>The surrounding neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>The ease of moving around the clinic</td>
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<tr>
<td>The private places to talk with staff</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If you’re assessing site amenities ask:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important is it to you, that:</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Nice but not Necessary</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The clinic is comfortable and pleasant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How would you rate:</strong></td>
<td>Lousy</td>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>Okay</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The comfort of the waiting room</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The comfort of the exam room</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extras to make the space a nicer place</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Determining how your facility or services rate as compared to the client’s expectation gives you valuable information. Because of client courtesy bias (e.g., a reluctance to complain or rate services poorly), it is important to pay attention to even slight differences between expectations and ratings. Administrators and staff need to be sensitive to subtle indications of dissatisfaction and to respond to an issue if only a small percentage of clients are not satisfied.

6. **Welcome and address client and employee complaints promptly**

You should not only accept complaints but welcome them. It's the only way you are going to find out what you could be doing better. Make it easy for clients to complain and have mechanisms in place for employees to address complaints from clients on the spot. Even if the system is not changed, clients’ problems can frequently be resolved through direct, immediate intervention.
Although providers and staff should be empowered to resolve complaints when possible, it is very helpful to designate a staff person as a “customer service representative” or a “manager on duty” where clients can be referred when they have a complaint. That individual should be trained to listen to client complaints and resolve those issues immediately, if possible. The “manager on duty” needs to document the complaint/concern, share it with staff and facilitate planning as a group to resolve the issue.

Five important actions for handling complaints include:

1. Listen carefully to the complaint
   - Avoid being defensive
   - Do not interrupt
2. Check for understanding by repeating back what you have heard:
   - “Let me review what I heard you say to make sure that I understand your concerns.”
3. Suggest possible solutions to the problem
4. Take immediate action
   - If appropriate and possible, take care of it yourself
   - If not, bring it to the attention of someone who can
   - Explain to the client what action you plan to take and what action they can take
5. Follow through and follow up

There should also be mechanisms in place for employees to share complaints/concerns about the facilities, systems, procedures, staff relations, etc. Anonymous questionnaires, incident reports, or a feedback process that is part of staff performance reviews or supervision meetings are options for soliciting employee concerns. Additionally, there should be a mechanism in place for internal stakeholders to share complaints and concerns.

The most effective ingredient for resolving a problem is ensuring that the client, staff, or stakeholder perceives that he or she has been heard, the problem has been acknowledged and a solution is forthcoming – all with courtesy and timeliness.

**Conclusion**

Investments in making a facility more user-friendly and efficient can be wasted. A dedication to meeting and exceeding customer expectations must accompany these efforts. Every step a customer takes to meet his/her healthcare needs should be viewed as an opportunity to meet and exceed a client’s expectations. We encourage providers to do all they can to make every client’s experience with your services productive and rewarding.

**Next Steps: Using the Customer Service Tools**

To assist Family PACT sites to assess their current customer service status and identify areas for improvement a “Customer Service Checklist for Family PACT Providers” is provided in this guide. We encourage each Family PACT site to consider each of the questions on the “Checklist” carefully and answer honestly whether or not the organization and/or staff
demonstrate the desired customer service attribute. After completing the checklist, summarize your data so that you can begin to identify common patterns. The questions where the response is “No” are the areas for improvement.

The process to address the “No” responses will vary. In some cases, it will be management or the Board that develops language regarding the organization’s commitment to excellent customer service. This may include revisions to vision and mission statements, new staff orientation, or on-going training on customer friendly service. Lastly involve as many staff as possible to assist in all areas of your clinic and practice and plan how to change the “No” to a “Yes”.

Another tool used in assessing customer service is the “Personal Evaluation Form”. It is designed for staff to assess their own customer service behavior patterns. It can be used as part of staff performance evaluation or to identify staff customer service training needs.

Finally, using data and feedback from customers, staff, and stakeholders to plan change at the organization is just as important as welcoming the feedback. It is important to work as a team to create a plan for changes, make the plan public, and then celebrate successes and milestones!
Customer Service Checklist for Family PACT Providers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Potential Actions for “No” Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is there a commitment to good customer service at all levels of the organization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss the importance of customer service and obtain commitments from Board, management and all staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is there a statement in place at the agency regarding commitment to good customer service?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Board and management develop additions to mission and vision statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. In vision and mission statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Board and management adds customer service requirements to job descriptions for all staff and shares those expectations with staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Posted in your clinic or work place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post the commitment to customer service in the clinic and work area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is providing good customer service included in job descriptions for all employees including management?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Board and management adds customer service requirements to job descriptions for all staff and shares those expectations with staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Does orientation for new employees includes skills for good customer service?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Customer service skills, particularly client centered communication, is discussed and practiced during orientation of new staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Is good customer service assessed as part of performance reviews for all employees?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Managers include discussion and feedback to employees on specific customer service skills as part of performance review. Corrective action is taken when an employee is causing dissatisfaction for other staff or clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Is there on-going training for employees about customer service?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arrange for employees to get guidance and practice in client centered communication and other customer service skills as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do managers model good customer service with internal customers, employees and colleagues?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assess and provide feedback to managers regarding how they treat and communicate with staff to insure it is customer friendly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Are internal customers (staff, employees, colleagues) needs being addressed?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have the whole facility cleaned regularly. Purchase necessary equipment or hire staff to insure safety. Improve accessibility as possible – i.e. get transportation to the area, provide parking, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Environment is clean, accessible and safe for staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide feedback to staff. Arrange for employees to get guidance and practice in client centered communication and other customer service skills as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Staff use effective communication skills, listen to each other and are friendly?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Potential Actions for “No” Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Staff are culturally competent with colleagues?</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Discuss cultural differences, celebrate diversity, provide guidance and practice on how to communicate in a culturally sensitive manner. Utilize the Family PACT “Cultural and Linguistic Competency Toolkit”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Are clients’ needs, barriers to care and cultural competency being addressed?</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Peer review of provider’s expertise and skills. Provide opportunities for updates and skills enhancement as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Providers have excellent medical expertise and exam skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Have the whole facility cleaned regularly. Purchase necessary equipment or hire staff to insure safety. Improve accessibility as possible – i.e. get transportation to the area, provide parking, add evening hours, make space teen and male friendly, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Environment is clean, accessible and safe</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Assess by observing staff/client interactions, client satisfaction surveys or interviews, complaints from clients, etc. Provide feedback to staff and plan for improvement as necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Staff members demonstrate effective communication skills, listen to clients and are friendly</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Assess by observing staff/client interactions, client satisfaction surveys or interviews. Utilize tools in the Family PACT “Cultural and Linguistic Competency Toolkit”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Staff demonstrate cultural competency</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Assess by observing staff/client interactions, client satisfaction surveys or interviews. Utilize tool in the Family PACT “Cultural and Linguistic Competency Toolkit”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Clients with LEP (Limited English Proficiency) can be served</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Assess by observing staff/client interactions, client satisfaction surveys or interviews. Utilize tool in the Family PACT “Cultural and Linguistic Competency Toolkit”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Systems are easy to navigate</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Discuss and/or map the client’s route through your system, count the number of different staff a client sees and/stops they make, walk the client’s path to see how clear the route is, review phone systems, appointment making, etc. Reduce the # of staff/stops a client encounters, streamline the client route through the clinic or mark it clearly, streamline phone answering and appointment making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Amenities include parking, access to public transportation, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Locate site near public transportation or encourage additional public transit to your site (if possible), provide free parking (if possible), create a kids play area in the waiting room, offer coffee/tea or other perks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Customer Service Checklist for Family PACT Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Potential Actions for “No” Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>h. Services are affordable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand that clients may be anxious or emotional accessing reproductive health services. Provide caring communication to reduce client stress. Streamline services/systems to reduce the time it takes a client to complete a visit. Have low cost referrals available for services beyond Family PACT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Systems in place to solicit feedback from clients.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct client satisfaction surveys, client focus groups or interviews or encourage clients to give anonymous suggestions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Systems in place to solicit feedback from staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ask staff to use a suggestion box, conduct staff satisfaction surveys, and solicit feedback during staff meetings, supervision meetings or performance reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Process to address and resolve client problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Design a process to review client feedback and work with staff to plan changes to address identified problems. Tell clients what you’re doing and why so they know you’re listening to concerns and improving the practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Process to address and resolve staff issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Design a process to review staff feedback and work together to plan changes to address identified problems. Tell staff what you’re doing and why, so they know you’re listening to concerns and improving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Mechanism in place to respond to client complaints</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Empower staff to address client complaints when possible. Identify a staff person who will talk with clients about complaints, follow through on solutions and follow-up with clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Mechanism in place to respond to staff complaints</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Empower managers to address staff complaints when possible. Identify a staff person(s) who will discuss staff complaints, follow through with solutions and follow-up with the staff person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Success is celebrated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inform and reward staff when there is improvement in customer service. Share positive feedback from clients with staff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Customer Service
Personal Evaluation Form
Customer Service
Personal Evaluation Form

Please check one of the four possible answers after each statement that you feel indicates your general behavior pattern.

I am the kind of person who:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior Pattern</th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greets every person with a smile.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Will help a client in need of assistance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quickly and respectfully responds to client needs.</td>
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<td>Works in a soothing and harmonious manner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaks politely and in a regulated tone to others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practices courteous acts in dealing with others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listens closely when others are speaking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deals with complaints quickly and accurately.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handles client agitations in a manner that resolves the problems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Considers health care work to be satisfying.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refrains from behavior that might annoy others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attends to clients as human beings who merit the best possible service.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>