

EBOOK

Intelligence with empathy: Building the future of compassionate care

How intelligent dining, environmental stewardship,
and enhanced patient observation are elevating
the human experience of inpatient care





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1. Executive summary

It was 1983 when the Wong-Baker FACES pain scale was introduced—the ubiquitous (and highly subjective) tool that still hangs on the wall in just about every healthcare facility in the country.

Three decades later, research from Press Ganey leaders Deirdre E. Mylod, PhD, and Thomas H. Lee, MD, [see next page: Measuring suffering to manage it] provide a more structured way to understand suffering, acknowledging that it can be identified, measured, and meaningfully reduced.

Today, the next evolution is underway—not by replacing human connection with technology, but by using innovation to elevate it. Hospitals are navigating an increasingly complex landscape, where support services such as food and nutrition, environmental services, and patient observation carry outsized influence on human experience. Yet teams providing these services are often burdened by manual tasks, fragmented workflows, and a transactional model that leaves little room for listening or empathy.

This guide is designed to help healthcare leaders chart a clearer path forward on a journey in which compassion shines as the North Star. New advances—from real-time location tools to AI-enabled communication and predictive insights—are giving support service teams the ability to work more efficiently, more effectively, and more connectedly. When technology accelerates the work that must be done, caregivers are free to do the work that matters most: forming trusting relationships, involving patients and families in decisions, and responding with compassion in the moments that shape healing.

In this environment, “innovation” is not about digitizing processes. It’s about orchestrating timely care that feels personal rather than procedural, relational rather than transactional. It’s about ensuring that every interaction—from delivering a meal to cleaning a room to steadily observing a patient—is an opportunity to reduce suffering and enhance the whole-person experience. That’s an experience wherein technology amplifies humanity instead of replacing it.

Measuring suffering to manage it

The landmark Press Ganey publication “A framework for reducing suffering in healthcare” by Deirdre E. Mylod, PhD, and Thomas H. Lee, MD, (2013) makes pain and suffering less subjective and more accurately measured by deconstructing the pain, distress, and hardships of patients and caregivers into three categories:

- **Unavoidable suffering** due to disease or treatment such as pain, symptoms, and/or anxiety.
- **Unavoidable psychosocial suffering** related to diagnosis, treatment navigation, and relationships.
- **Avoidable suffering** due to dysfunctions in care delivery like delays, poor communication, and inferior coordination.

The research suggests that using patient experience data helps identify opportunities to reduce suffering by providing clinicians and healthcare support staff guidance and tools to deliver empathetic, coordinated care—care that’s not centered around a diagnosis, but around individual patients.



2. Rethinking inpatient care holistically

As healthcare organizations increasingly prioritize elevating the patient experience, one insight has become clear: a one-size-fits-all approach no longer serves the needs of patients or the teams who care for them. Today, hospitals can reimagine what inpatient care can look like—moving beyond rigid routines and instead shaping experiences that are innovative, responsive, personalized, and grounded in compassion.

Advances in data, intelligent systems, and real-time visibility are illuminating a new path forward. Rather than relying on fixed schedules or manual checklists, support services can now anticipate needs, coordinate more seamlessly, and contribute more meaningfully to a patient's well-being. This shift allows organizations to broaden their focus from hospital to hospitality—creating environments that feel safer, cleaner, and more connected to the whole person.

1. Food and nutrition > **Intelligent dining**
2. Environmental services > **Environmental stewardship**
3. Patient observation > **Real-time predictive monitoring**

This resource guide is intended to help inpatient professionals provide compassionate, next-generation experiences that improve the health of organizations, as well as the health and wellbeing of their patients.

3. Making compassion tangible: The power of a hot meal

The world over, there's no question about the power of a hot bowl of chicken soup—its delivery is about more than a meal; it's about soulful sustenance.

But what about when that soup is delivered cold, or so salty that patients can't stand to eat more than a few bites? What if patients sit waiting for a spoon, as the minutes tick on and they stare at steam escaping? Those experiences make any patient—no matter their diagnosis—feel like a box that's checked on a paper menu.

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A good meal brings a sense of home to a place where it can feel like anything but.

Brian Ricci

Director of Client Success and Innovation
Morrison Healthcare Patient Solutions



Timeliness, temperature, and accuracy have long been the three most influential factors in the patient experience. Yet many health systems still operate with limited visibility into the meal ordering, preparation, and delivery process. These blind spots can ultimately lead to heightened anxiety and discomfort for patients and their family members, as well as inefficiencies across multiple hospital care teams.

Today, most food service teams navigate sprawling facilities, unpredictable staffing, sub-optimally designed kitchens, and inefficient production equipment. Missed orders, misplaced trays, and delays in pickup frustrate patients and caregivers. Communication between food service and clinical staff often happens through handwritten notes or truncated radio calls, placing further demand on already-strained nursing teams. These outdated communication methods leave room for requests to be missed or forgotten during the hustle of meal service, adding undue stress onto the nursing teams and distracting from patient care.

Transitioning away from manual checks, fragmented communication, and paper-based workflows can not only

improve timeliness, temperature, and accuracy of meals, but it also reduces the friction that erodes patient trust and drains staff capacity. When operational inefficiencies are alleviated, nurses and support teams gain back time and emotional bandwidth to operate at the top of their license, engage more meaningfully, and demonstrate compassion in ways that are perceptible to patients.

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Giving patients choice and autonomy—even something as simple as ordering their own meal—restores a sense of dignity during hospitalization.

Katie Beggs

Senior Content Marketing Manager
Compass Digital

Innovation on the menu

An evolution of hospital dining can transform the experience from reactive to predictive—one that anticipates patient needs and unites hospitality with clinical precision.

Advances in intelligent location technology now allow teams to communicate more effectively while also tracking meal movement down to the room level, providing detailed data on order taking, tray assembly, delivery, and pickup. This visibility reduces bottlenecks that once delayed service, helps managers reallocate resources instantly, and ensures food reaches patients at the ideal temperature.

AI-powered voice- and language-recognition tools add a second layer of safety and efficiency. Everyday conversations between team members can be transformed into actionable insights—identifying missing items, recurring requests, or allergy confirmations—without adding manual data entry. Over time, these patterns reveal systemic issues and training opportunities, further reducing errors that could cause discomfort or harm, and support clinical caregivers' focus on patient care.



The kitchen as the nexus of timeliness, temperature, and accuracy

Few people outside of food and nutrition teams realize that today's kitchens often aren't optimally designed. Prep stations aren't always configured logically for efficient tray preparation. Nor are kitchens always the center of sprawling facilities, meaning orders must be carted far away from where they're made. This niche in healthcare is also not immune to the persistent staffing problems that plague clinical and administrative teams. The downstream effect of these challenges—with impacts on timeliness, temperature, and accuracy—can create a negative patient experience.

That's why one hospital found it imperative to pilot new technology—an "AI sous chef" of sorts—that supports dietitians and staff to enhance meal accuracy and safety.

The health system's kitchen was already set up with two identical lines for meal tray assembly. That enabled them to test a new, AI-powered innovation that left one line as a control group with printed meal tickets and the other with a

scannable, barcoded ticket. A camera mounted above the end of the test line scanned barcoded tickets to verify that each tray contained the correct number of items and that every order was 100% accurate. Ensuring patients received food safe for their specific allergies and dysphagia-related texture modifications was critical. The results included:

- **36% fewer** missing items on trays completed
- **16% faster** order completion, from ticket printing to tray cart loading

AI-supported assembly proved so fast and accurate that many were shifted from the manual "control" line to the AI-powered line.

What's next for intelligent dining

In an increasingly digital world, healthcare continues to grapple with patients' consumer-level expectations. These expectations take myriad forms—but they're particularly high for people used to app-based food orders, customized to their preferences and delivered hot and fast. Just like these delivery services, hospital food service is increasingly a graded experience.

A number of automated innovations—now in pilot or the early stages of implementation—are already improving experiences for patients and care teams alike. These include:

- A patient-facing meal ordering app that allows patients to securely log in with the number on their wristband. They are then only shown menu options that are appropriate for their care plan. The platform also lets family members order meals to the bedside, recognizing loved ones as essential parts of the care team and supporting shared nourishment during hospitalization.
- Ways for patients to receive meals beyond turkey sandwiches and pudding cups during "off hours," which is especially useful for unexpected ER admissions, outpatient departments, and family-centered departments like the infant NICU.
- Automations that share what patients have eaten with their clinicians and dietitians. The "food as medicine" movement can hasten healing and reduce avoidable suffering, especially when there's visibility into what patients are consuming. Automation also tracks which foods are eaten most often—or not—to inform future dietitians and kitchen decisions.
- Integrations between food and nutrition teams and environmental services to ensure spills and completed meals/trays are picked up faster during peak times, making rooms cleaner, less cluttered, and more hospitable.

4. Rethinking housekeeping's role in healing transforms environmental stewardship



If a housekeeper leaves a visual cue for a patient telling them, 'I was here earlier, I thoroughly cleaned and disinfected your room to keep you safe—I'm here to serve,' that reduces stress in a meaningful way and makes that professional become part of the care team."

Sophia McCrae

Vice President of Operational Strategy
Crothall Healthcare

Whole-person care takes a holistic approach to wellness by incorporating physical, emotional, social, and spiritual factors into patient conversations and care. Although healthcare-associated infections like MRSA and CLABSI have declined in recent years, a perceived high risk of infection remains top of mind for patients.

Far beyond traditional considerations around safe cleaning products, emerging adjunct technologies can help create hospital environments that are both cleaner and more human-centered than ever before.

No matter what team is using supportive innovations, understanding AI, and where it plays a role in the continuum of care, is vital. Operating at top of license isn't just a brass ring for physicians and nurses. It's a goal for those whose work is often invisible—yet just as crucial in making hospitals more hospitable.

Reducing avoidable suffering through whole-patient care

The modern model of compassionate care recognizes that suffering takes multiple forms—and that prevention is within reach when teams work holistically. Environmental services professionals play a crucial role in addressing each dimension of patient well-being:

- **Physical suffering:** Mitigated through rigorous infection-prevention protocols, safe cleaning agents, and evidence-based disinfection practices.
- **Emotional suffering:** Reduced when patients see and feel that their environment is cared for with empathy, consistency, and attention to detail.

Ultimately, the goal is to prevent **avoidable** suffering—whether physical or emotional—through reliable systems, predictive technologies, and seamless coordination across EVS, clinical, and hospitality teams.



Balancing innovation and intention

Yesterday's EVS teams were encouraged to clean occupied patient rooms as quickly as possible and engage minimally—ideally only when the room was unoccupied. Today, these teams are recognized as vital contributors to the patient experience. While they won't deliver clinical updates or make medical decisions, EVS and hospitality staff are uniquely positioned to engage with patients through kindness, reassurance, and support—touchpoints that can profoundly shape the perception of care.

Making empathy part of the environment—especially with a physical manifestation of that ethos—is just as much a

cultural change as a technological one. For example, many hospitals leave notes to let patients know their room was cleaned in their absence, and others distribute small baby safety gifts to new moms.

Advances in AI and automation are empowering these environmental stewards to focus on their role in patient wellness via meaningful engagement and patient reassurance. But these advancements aren't just improving efficiency. They're redefining how EVS teams contribute to the healing experience. From intelligent task management to autonomous disinfection, technology is taking what's typically routine and repetitive so people can focus on the personal and purposeful.



Innovation	Results
<p>AI-powered task management systems create “digital duty lists” for equitable workflows.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Improved work distribution increased efficiency, freeing up time for direct patient interaction and care
<p>Robotic scrubbers with engaging chimes and emotives clean floors autonomously during peak hospital hours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Less repetitive manual labor for EVS teams — Enhanced patients’ psychological safety — Water conservation due to “green” design
<p>AI-powered UV-C devices emit UV rays to disinfect operating room high touchpoints when personnel aren’t detected.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Better infection prevention — Reduced manual burden for staff — Enhanced patient safety
<p>Smart restroom technology provides real-time visibility into traffic volumes via throughput counters and precise consumables tracking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Reduced manual burden for staff — Less waste — Increased reliability in restroom cleanliness and stocking
<p>Phone-enabled disinfection and hygiene reminders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Reduced environmental pathogens — Wellness education for patients and staff

5. Compassion in practice: Relationships that are anticipatory, not reactive

Patient observation—often referred to as “patient sitter”—has long been a clinical necessity, but rarely an area of transformation. Traditionally, patient sitters were assigned to watch high-risk patients to ensure they didn’t harm themselves or others. But the role has evolved significantly; today’s patient observers are trained caregivers who provide reassurance, guidance, and emotional stability for a wide range of patients, from older adults to children unfamiliar with the hospital environment.

This shift reflects a core truth: No patient should suffer unnecessarily. Modern observation blends human attentiveness with real-time insight, equipping observers to anticipate needs rather than merely react to them. The result is a care model that preserves dignity, prevents harm, and supports overextended nursing teams by allowing them to focus on top-of-license tasks.



Human-centered attention, elevated by training



A nurse can't be everywhere at the same time. We really are a liaison for the hospital, and for patients, riding what can be a rollercoaster of care with them. If they need food or a thermostat adjusted, we can help make changes in real time, so clinical caregivers are not interrupted.

Lauren Prepchuk

Regional Vice President of Patient
Transportation and Patient Observation
Crothall Healthcare

The role of patient observers has evolved beyond a watchful eye. Today, they can be caregivers trained in de-escalation, behavioral health, and crisis prevention, for example, and serve as the conduit between patients and the broader care team.

Through a consistent, compassionate presence, these observers reduce fear, loneliness, and confusion—conditions that can compound clinical suffering. Their relationships with patients create emotional stability, while a constant feedback loop with clinical teams ensures physical risks are recognized early.

Transitioning from monitoring to connecting

Observation doesn't mean simply "watching" anymore. Equipped with digital tools, observers now document patient behavior in real time—replacing outdated paper logs with secure, connected communications that update every 15 minutes and flag irregularities for clinicians. Even environmental cues are now part of the equation. Observers are trained to identify factors like squeaky doors, flashing lights, and uncomfortable temperatures that hinder rest or recovery—which very often go unreported by patients.

When paired with predictive analytics, these insights not only enhance patient safety, but also optimize staffing and create a connected ecosystem of care. Observation data helps hospitals identify when constant one-to-one supervision is truly required, reducing unnecessary use of resources and allowing clinical staff to focus on top-of-license tasks.





The future of predictive observation

The next evolution of patient observation goes beyond vigilance—it listens to the body itself. Emerging biometric and radar-based technologies are expanding the definition of compassionate care by identifying distress before it's visible.

Wearable sensors, applied discreetly during intake, can track subtle fluctuations in heart rate, skin temperature, perspiration, and sleep quality. These data points form a physiological language of emotion and stress, helping care teams recognize agitation, anxiety, and decline before an event occurs. Other innovations like non-contact systems are also being tested to detect micro-movements and changes in breathing patterns without touching the patient or intruding on privacy.

Together, these technologies provide a deeper layer of safety for patients and their care teams, creating a model where observation is continuous, intelligent, and unobtrusive.

Reimagining patient monitoring: Its impact on care—and on care teams

- Enables earlier recognition of patient distress or behavioral escalation
- Improves time-to-intervention for clinical and support teams
- Reduces patient falls, workplace violence incidents, and other adverse events
- Enhances emotional safety while protecting patient dignity through a continuous, compassionate presence
- Allows clinical professionals to focus on practicing at the top of their license
- Reduces avoidable suffering in real time
- Elevates overall care delivery

Conclusion

Across food and nutrition, environmental services, and patient observation, a new model of inpatient care is emerging that measures its success not only in outcomes, but in reducing human suffering.

When innovation is guided by compassion, data becomes more than a metric. It becomes a mirror, reflecting the lived experience of patients and caregivers in concert. Intelligent dining turns timeliness and temperature into acts of empathy. Environmental stewardship transforms cleanliness into reassurance. Predictive observation is the manifestation of how vigilance drives dignity and safety.

Each of these advancements demonstrates that technology's greatest power is not in replacing the human touch, but in restoring it. And this means caregivers are free to focus on the ultimate purpose behind their work: Connecting, comforting, and caring for others.

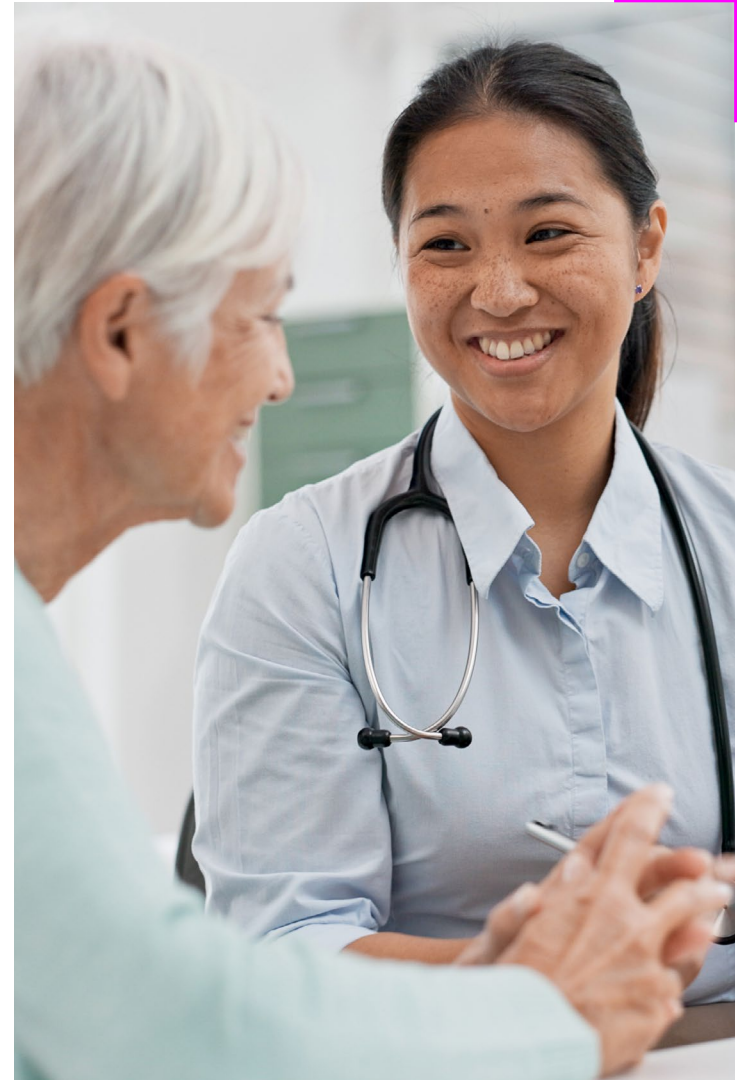
The future of care is smarter and kinder. It's a future where innovation serves purpose, where empathy is measurable, and where science helps us anticipate suffering before it begins. By uniting intelligence and intention, we can create a healthcare experience that is predictive, personalized, and profoundly compassionate—one that heals both the patient and the process itself.

See how intelligent dining, environmental stewardship, and enhanced observation can elevate your care experience—and discover how to take the next step.



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compass-healthcare.com



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