

# Driving Excellence in Patient Experience: Improving Communication to Cultivate and Sustain a Patient-Centered Culture

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## Background

The National University Hospital (NUH) is an academic medical centre in Singapore with 1,221 beds in service and over 172 subspecialties. The hospital remains committed to its strategic objective to improve Patient Experience and believes that effective empathetic communication is integral in influencing Patient Experience. Engaging informed patients will lead to shared decision making of their treatment plans, resulting in better patient safety and improved clinical outcomes.

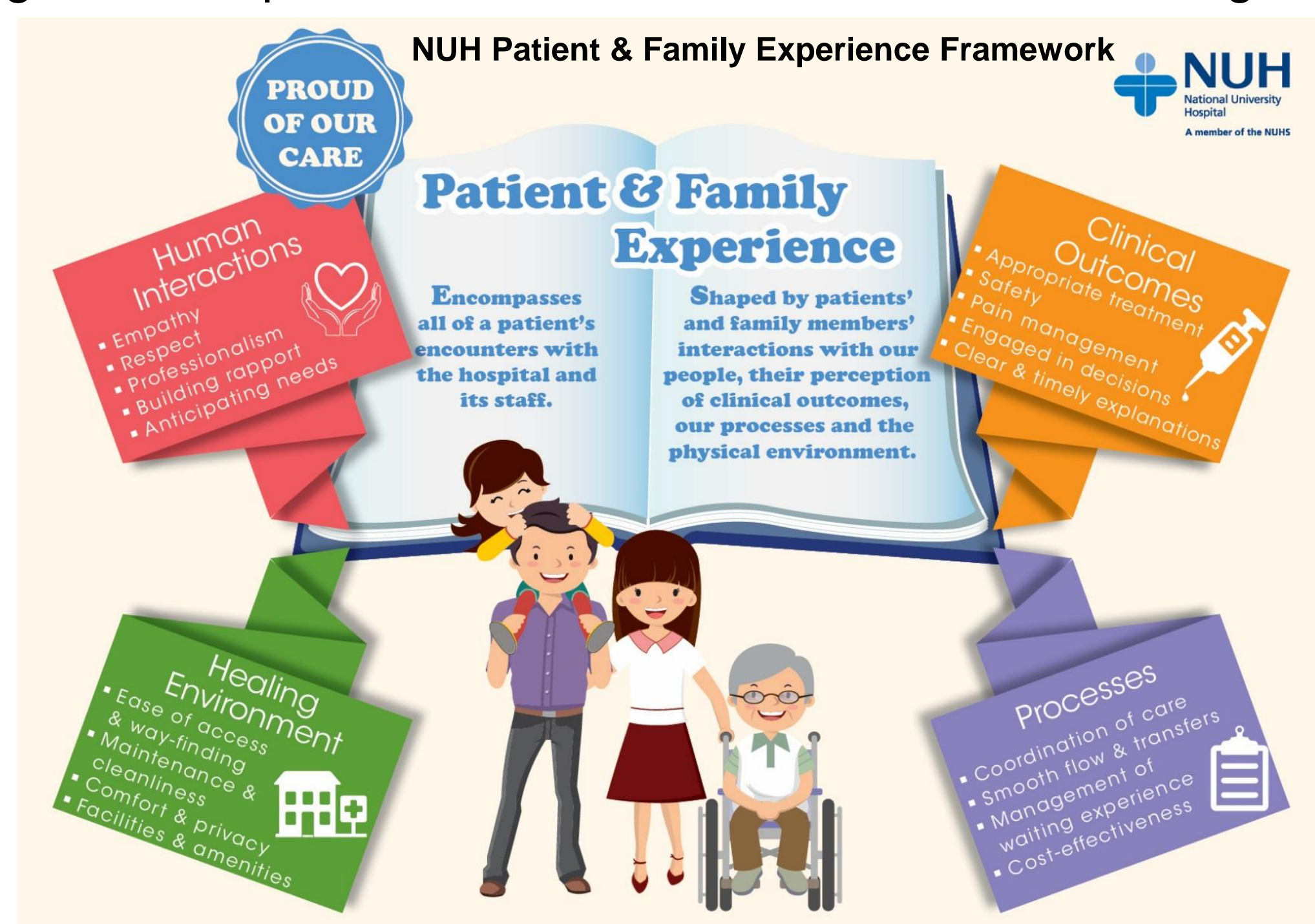


Figure 1. Patient and Family Experience Framework

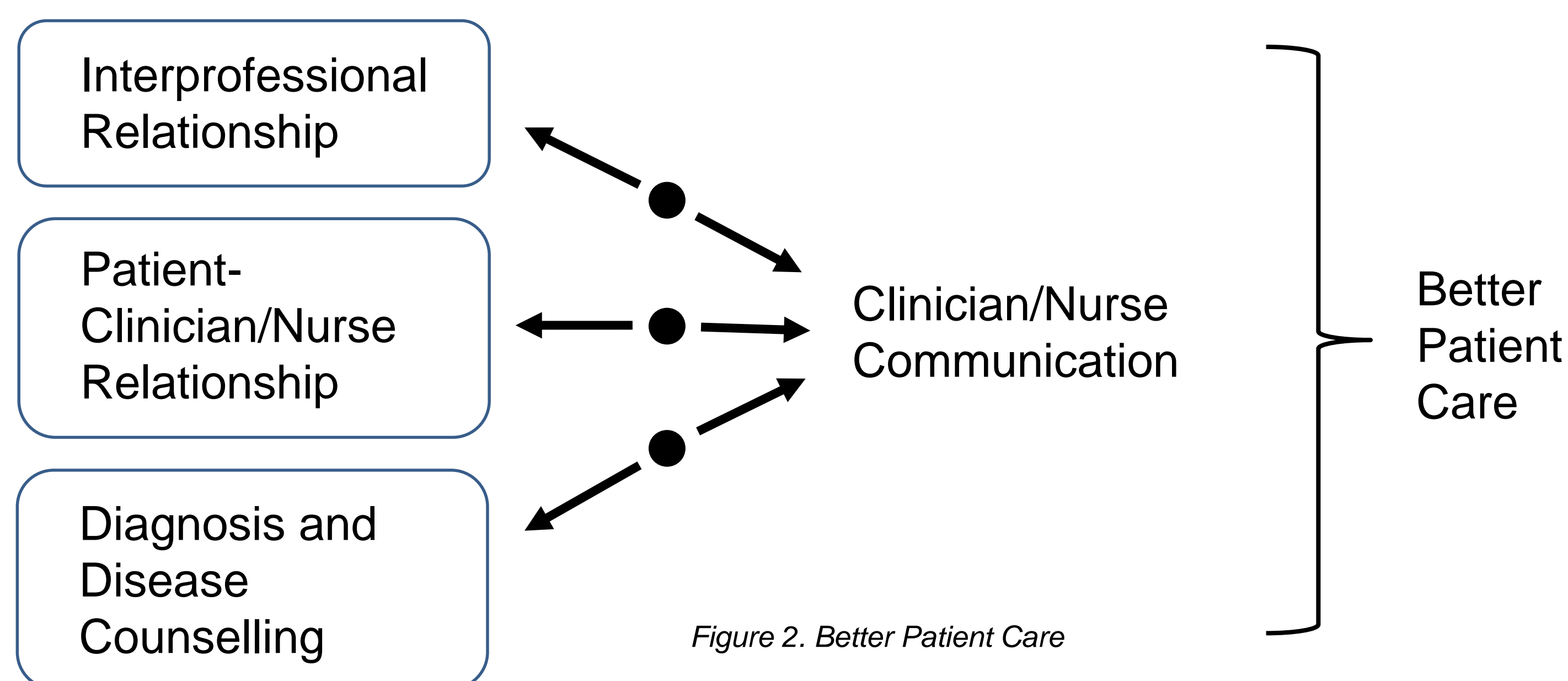


Figure 2. Better Patient Care

Also, studies on doctor-patient communication have demonstrated patient discontent even when many doctors considered the communication adequate or even excellent.\*



Figure 3. The NUH Patient and Family Experience Bulletin

**What does "1 in 5" patient encounters (actually) mean?**

1 in 5 encounters → 20%

**Every year, there would be 164,498 encounters where patients do not fully understand their healthcare providers' explanation about their care and treatment!**

NUH Outpatient Attendances (2016)		
Frequency	Patient Attendances	x 20%
Daily	2,285	457
Monthly	68,541	13,708
Yearly	822,489	164,498

Source: NUH MIS Statistical Report, Annual Report for Calendar Year 2016

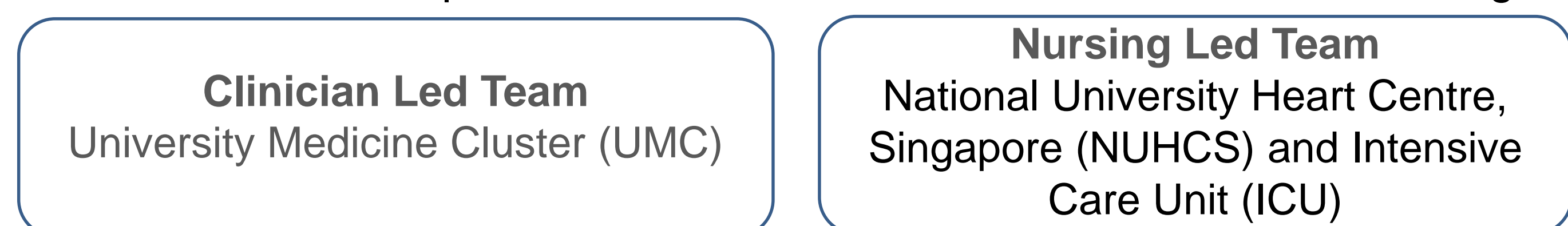
Figure 4. '1 in 5' Patient Encounters Explained

## Aim

To improve the hospital's overall Patient Experience Score to 80% by December 2017 in support of the hospital's focus in providing excellent clinical care with exceptional patient experience through cultivating empathetic communication.

## Guiding Principles

Decision was made in 2016 to pilot a methodology of improving communication to cultivate and sustain a patient-centered culture with stakeholders from two groups.



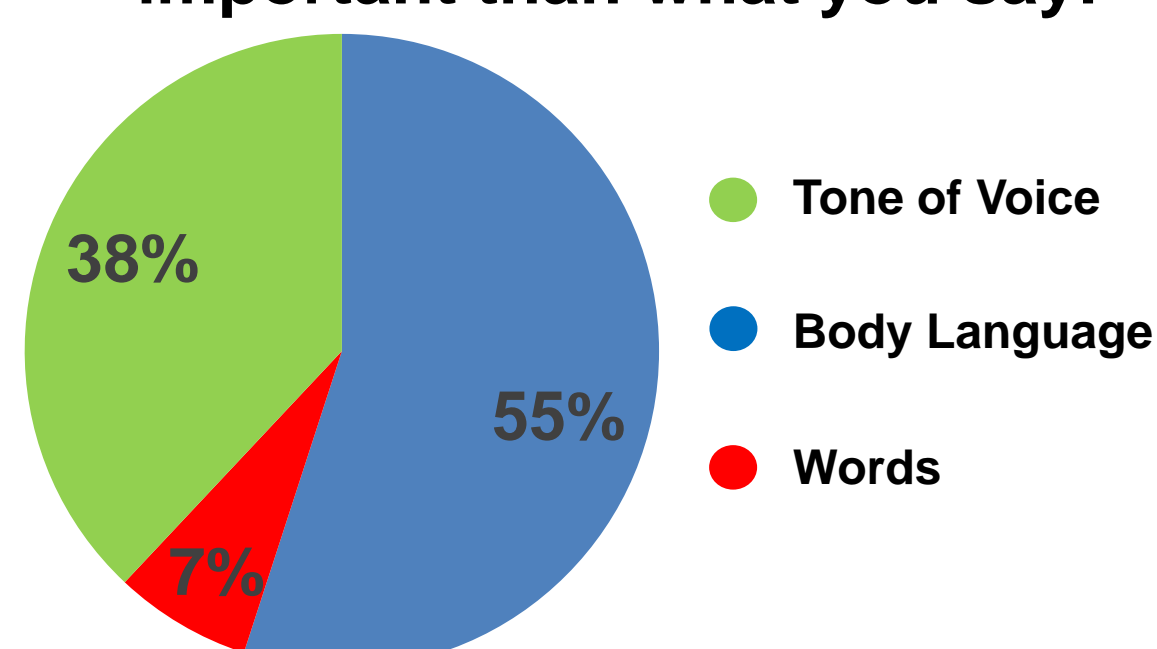
Facilitated by Quality Improvement & Patient Experience (QIPE) department

Figure 5. Patient Experience Improvement Teams

Buy-in was initiated to get our clinicians and nurses to realize:-

1. How you say it is no less important than what you say!

2. The importance of finding out what matters to patients and family members through active listening.



Albert Mehrabian proposed 3 Vs of Communication  
Source: <http://www.businessballs.com/mehrabiancommunications.htm>

Figure 6. The 3 Vs of Communication



Figure 7. What Matters To Patients and their Family

Ideas  
Concerns  
Expectations

## Methodology

Initiative	Clinician Led Initiative Empathetic 2-Way Communication Skills Coaching for Junior Residents attached to Medicine discipline	Nursing Led Initiative Patient Experience (PE) Champions Workgroup
Objective	To maintain communication standards with each new recruitment of Residents, enabling them to communicate empathetically, becoming better patient advocates.	To inculcate habit of being conscious of what matters to patients and family members to provide better patient and family experience.  PE Champions: - Serve as role-models to peers and colleagues. - Build positive patient-centered culture through communication and teamwork.
Administered through	- Teaching of practical communication tips in building rapport followed by scenario based experiential learning. - Senior Residents serving as tutors together with simulated patients in role-play with Junior Residents.	- Empathetic communication nuggets teaching. - Cross sharing of learnings from actual patient feedback cases. - Mentorship to populate a positive patient-centric culture in the spirit of 'See one, Do one, Teach one'.

Table 1. Methodology of Clinician and Nurse Led Initiative

## Results

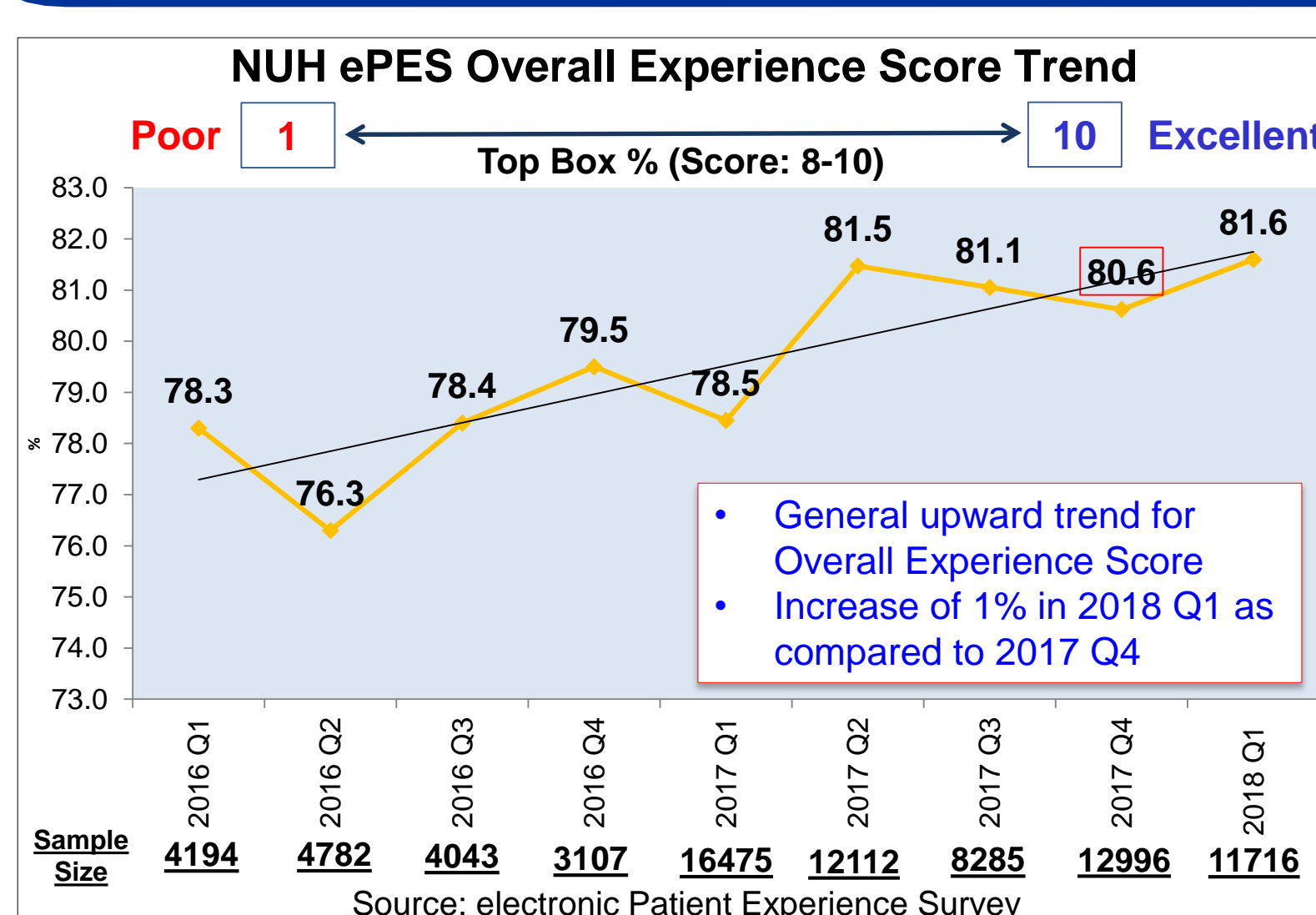


Figure 8. NUH ePES Overall Experience Score Trend

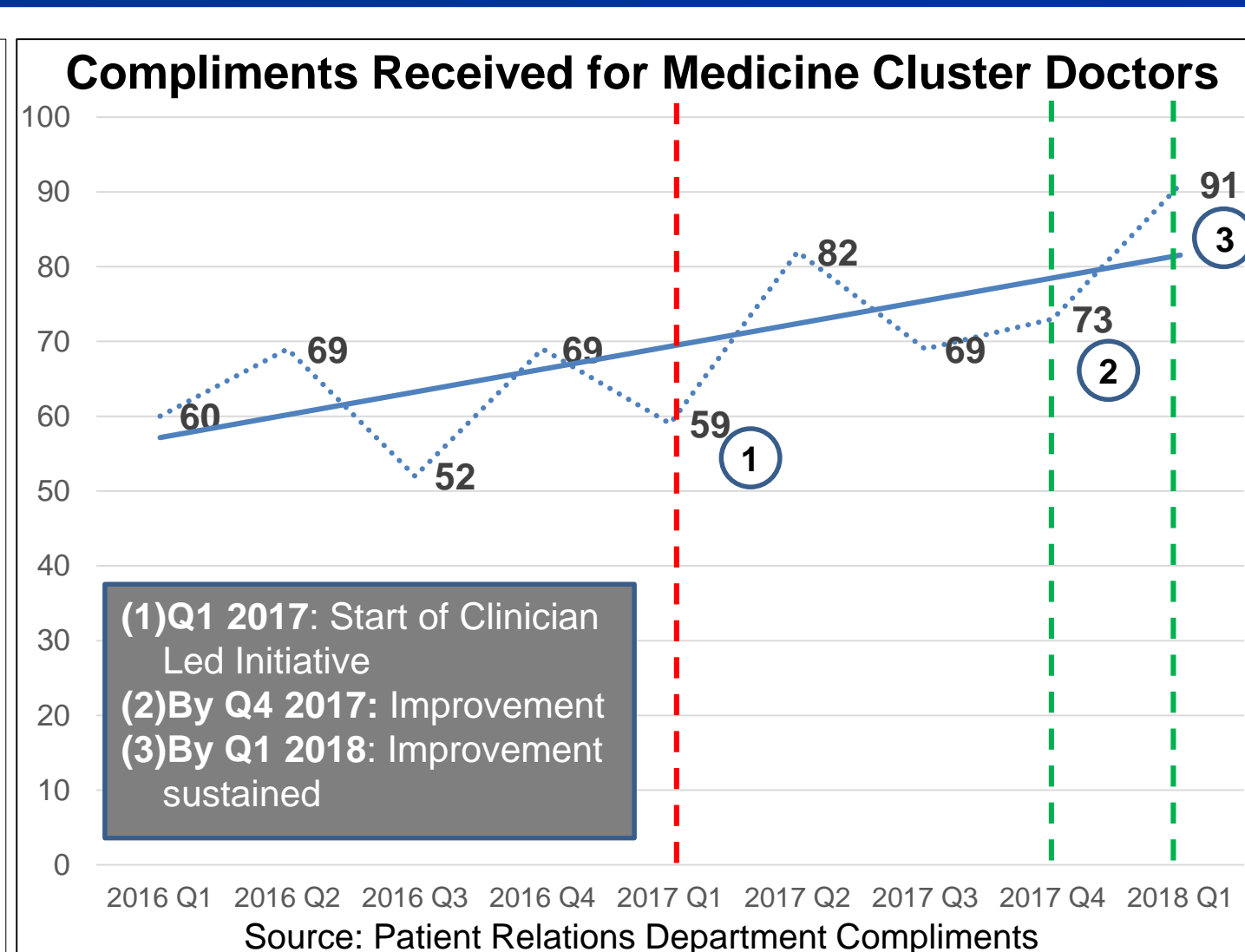


Figure 9. Compliments Received for Medicine Cluster Doctors

- Coaching was useful and effective in maintaining communication standards with each new recruitment of Residents and nurses.
- Junior Residents practiced in a safe environment, received personal feedback and felt more confident in communicating effectively with empathy in their daily work.
- Experienced senior clinicians and nurses also benefitted from the value of teaching how to connect with empathy and be better communicators at work.
- Both initiatives have been well received and are slated for spread to other hospital disciplines.

## References

\* Doctor-Patient Communication: A Review. *The Ochsner Journal* 10:38-43, 2010 © Academic Division of Ochsner Clinic Foundation  
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