It’s December 2016 and I, along with many other leaders in healthcare, would love to receive a crystal ball as a holiday gift. What will 2017 bring? There are a lot of policy “balls” up in the air, so for the moment, let’s focus on what we know.

What we know, according to a December 2016 Harvard Business Review article, is that “Health Care Needs Real Competition.” In the article, authors Leemore S. Dafny and Thomas H. Lee review the barriers to competition, what needs to change, and what will catalyze competition. They also review the role each stakeholder plays in making healthcare competition a reality.

There are a number of lessons for patient experience professionals in this article. Here are two of them to ponder:

- The authors note a vital first step to catalyzing competition is to “put patients first.” They cite as an example Cleveland Clinic’s commitment to same-day appointments. The authors write “To be sure, reorganizing care delivery to meet patients’ needs is not easy. Unlike same-day appointments, which are fairly straightforward to implement, other changes can be highly disruptive.” Let those sentences sink in for a minute. Your organization may say “patient first.” But are you really ready to say “no” to some stakeholders so you can say “yes” to the patient in 2017? As a patient experience professional, have you set the stage for “patient first” decisions among the key stakeholders in your organization?

- In a world of competition, the authors’ state “Patients should no longer settle for care that is not coordinated, compassionate, safe and technically excellent. When it falls short, they should be vocal—or leave.” The ability of patients to actually leave is dependent on some other factors the authors write about such as provider networks; however the message is clear. To be ready for the future, healthcare providers must be ready to compete on value. And part of “value” is service. As a patient experience leader, how are you communicating to your organization that patients do have a choice in care? Are you prepared to listen to vocal patients who expect to be cared for in a system that works for them? And what will true “care coordination” look like in order to deliver competitive value?

None of us are likely to receive a crystal ball this holiday. However all of us can know one thing for certain. Our privilege is to care for people in some of the most vulnerable or most joyful moments of their lives. Regardless of policy
decisions in 2017, we owe it to our patients to be ready to compete – to bring our best to them – in every encounter, for every patient, every day.

To learn more about the Baird Model for Service Excellence, employee engagement or leadership development workshops, or to sign up for her FREE newsletter, write to info@baird-group.com.