When Kim Lopez and her co-workers discovered customer service training for healthcare was often expensive and outdated, they decided to come up with a solution. Now other hospitals across the nation want to learn from them.

“The idea is that it’s a really personal approach to customer service,” said Lopez, a training specialist in Revenue Cycle Support Services.

The team created customer service videos for their own department. Now those videos will be used as a training tool throughout University of Utah Health, and potentially bought by other health institutions.

“We were able to produce a free resource for the entire institution,” said Shannon Lingwall, the Revenue Cycle Training manager. “The executive suite was blown away we would think beyond our own group.”

Lopez and her team believe every employee’s goal should be to provide “unexpected” customer service to everyone: the patient in the clinic, the family paying bills and even fellow co-workers.

“When we are working well together internally, our customers and our patients will see that,” Lopez said.

The training team hopes all staff will get R.E.A.L. — using Respect, Empathy and Attention to create a Lasting impression. That can be as simple and meaningful as smiling and keeping the room clean.

The six videos, which were funded by Imagine Perfect Care, encourage viewers to use emotional intelligence and appreciate that other people may see things differently than you. And they remind the viewer that bad customer service lingers. Studies show that someone receiving bad customer service may tell up to 20 people about their experience.

All of the videos use a wide range of real-life employees, but the training was broad enough to make it applicable throughout U of U Health. A facilitator training is now being offered with ways to make the training customizable to different areas of the organization.
Starting in May, a quarterly training open to all will also be offered at the main hospital. The goal is to create a consistent message with a personal touch.

And it seems to be making a real difference. After the emergency department intake staff received the training, their “exceptional patient experience” score went up by 19 percent. She stresses that the training specialists want to build on the already strong customer service provided at the University of Utah. Their effort was not a response to a perceived problem.

But they discovered the training impacted their own department too. The effort to be more present — whether not being on phones, making eye contact and being respectful — has helped to improve their department’s culture.

“We talk about mindset — starting with belief and attitude,” she said. “Your actions outwardly show what you believe.”

By Julia Lyon