Lost and Found. I was speaking with the manager of a busy hospital switchboard recently, and she was outlining some of the assorted responsibilities of their operators. Operators at the facility were in charge of Lost and Found inquiries, which consumed a surprising amount of the operator staff’s time.

This struck me as a perfect example of the switchboard operator challenge in healthcare. In addition to heavy call load from doctors, patients, family members, insurance agents, and other callers, operators frequently become the default parking spot for tasks that have no other obvious or logical owner. Although many responsibilities are given to operators to ensure there is 24/7 coverage for important functions (hospital switchboards are typically staffed around the clock), some of these tasks are simply looking for a home. Lost and Found is just one more task added to the growing list of responsibilities for operators at this particular hospital. This begs a compelling question. How do operators ensure a positive caller experience while managing calls and the dozens of other tasks they’re assigned with, tasks which can impact the health and well being of patients?

Competing Priorities

In examining hospital operator job postings on sites such as Monster, Career Builder, and Indeed, the position’s challenges become clear. In addition to the primary responsibility of managing calls and supporting a pleasant caller experience that can improve patient satisfaction, hospital operators are frequently tasked with numerous non-call handling responsibilities:

- Announce, clear, and track medical codes via code log
- Page staff and personnel as needed, track via page log
- Provide security or concierge coverage, as needed
- Coordinate medical response to inbound ambulances and MedFlights
- Monitor medical gas supplies
- Notify security and medical staff of any external emergencies that may impact the hospital
- Maintain on-call schedule and provide on-call information to staff and employees
- Initiate emergency/adverse event procedures and notify key personnel, update procedure manuals as needed
- Schedule diagnostics procedures on behalf of patients and medical staff
- Provide morgue attendant duties as needed
The challenge for operators comes in trying to balance competing priorities. Deliver excellent service to callers to help generate revenue and improve the hospital’s brand image on one hand. Monitor alarms, communicate vital information across the facility, and coordinate medical responses that can literally be matters of life and death on the other hand.

Unfortunately for callers, operators must drop everything in certain instances to manage one of their non-call handling responsibilities, such as an urgent Code. During these events, calls are left to ring or are put on hold until operators can finish their Code processes (announcing, notifying, clearing, tracking, etc.) and jump back into their primary responsibility -- answering the phone. Callers, meanwhile, have no knowledge or perspective on why the phone remains unanswered and grow increasingly frustrated at the lack of access to hospital destinations or information.

How then can the hospital ensure a pleasant caller experience while also allowing operators the time to deal with their non-call handling responsibilities?

**The Parlance Partnership**

Parlance partners with hospitals to help solve this challenge by providing operators with a 24/7 assistant operator. Parlance Operator Assistant™ immediately greets callers and asks them for their destination -- in the same way operators greet and query the caller. Operator Assistant connects callers with routine requests to their destinations in seconds without lengthy dialogs or option menus. The solution also identifies callers with more complex requests that would be better served by an operator, and immediately sends them to the switchboard for further assistance.

We first survey your operators and listen to your callers to identify areas where Parlance’s assistant operators can be deployed to help operators serve both of their priorities -- great service for callers, and availability for non-call handling responsibilities. The resulting insights into each hospital’s operator responsibilities and processes help us recommend a partnership that best suits each facility’s unique operator challenges.

The resulting partnership typically reduces calls to the switchboard by more than half. This helps ensure operators are available to serve both of their competing priorities -- great service for callers, and time to manage non-call handling duties that impact patient health and hospital efficiency. It’s a win-win-win situation for the operator, the caller, and the hospital.

Switchboard operators in hospitals today have a difficult and demanding role to play with implications that go beyond the voice network to impact the health and well being of patients. Although it will continue to be an ongoing challenge for operators to manage their numerous non-call handling tasks, there is help for answering the phone.

Contact Parlance today to schedule your no-cost, zero-obligation Operator Survey. Let us show you the impact an assistant operator can have at your facility.
About the Author
As Director of Marketing at Parlance, Mark Bedard is responsible for promoting the value of Parlance and Operator Assistant in the marketplace. Mark possesses more than a decade of experience in helping technology companies align sales and marketing efforts with their customers’ needs.

Parlance Corporation
Parlance helps a growing number of healthcare facilities, colleges & universities, and large enterprises deliver a positive caller experience with auto attendant solutions that callers actually like. Elevate each caller experience, drive efficient operations, and move beyond the typical auto attendant. www.parlancecorp.com

Parlance Operator Assistant™
Parlance Operator Assistant™ is specifically designed to deliver a positive caller experience that yields greater levels of self-service for callers to and within your organization. A fast, simple, and intuitive call connection means happier callers, more available (and less stressed) operators, and time and cost savings for the enterprise. Operator call load is reduced, operational costs go down, and callers get to where they need to go quickly while never feeling trapped or isolated. www.parlancecorp.com/operator-assistant-auto-attendant