An insight critical to understanding the relationship of flow to patient satisfaction comes as we consider this question: Are they patients or are they customers? In fact, they are always both patients and customers, to varying degrees, as illustrated below. For example, if someone is 80 percent patient, that person is still 20 percent customer.

In every clinical scenario, we need to make a customer service diagnosis as well as the clinical diagnosis. We do this by using a simple diagnostic rule: The more horizontal they are, the more they are a patient. The more vertical they are, the more they are a customer.

In the care of inpatients, we are in the business of taking patients from horizontal to vertical. We need to assess what percentage patient they are and apply science-technical skills to their illness or injury. For the percentage customer they are, we need to apply patient satisfaction-flow skills to address that part of their care.

Figure 3.4: The Patient/Customer Relationship

Used with permission from Meyer T, Cates R: Leadership for Great Customer Service 2004, Chicago, Health Administration Press