8 Ways to Improve Patient Satisfaction

**THE BASICS**

In the new rules of reimbursement, hospitals and private practices are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of patient satisfaction. Hospitals are tied to scores from Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) surveys and are well aware of their relationship to government payments. Physicians play an important part in those scores and will be progressively managed by them in the future. Now, more than ever before, it is crucial to ensure your practice has routines in place that benefit your patients and provide a pleasing experience – regardless of the cause of the visit.

**INDIRECT AND DIRECT INFLUENCES**

Improving patient satisfaction does not always require sweeping changes in processes and systems, although it can. Sometimes, basic human interaction can make all the difference. After all, what people desire most is respect, appreciation, and concern. While people have different needs and expectations, patient satisfaction can be divided into two main areas: Indirect influences and Direct influences.

Indirect influences are those not created by direct interaction between a patient and their physician or other healthcare staff. These items include having organized care processes in place, as well as providing a means for staff buy-in and training.

- **Provide timely service** – Nobody wants to wait for service. It is critical that hospitals and offices develop a system where patients are not kept waiting to be seen, get test results, or receive care. With proper planning and a checklist of procedures, patient care can be a fine-tuned machine that benefits everyone.

- **Train employees** – Well-trained staff can be the difference between successful care and a lawsuit. Instruction on customer service, handling patient complaints, HCAHP surveys, computers and software, and a variety of professional education is imperative to progressive improvement.

- **Create Good Morale** – When staff members are content with their job and work atmosphere, they are more likely to pass that along to patients, and, they do a better job. Good morale comes from recognizing good work, including staff in plans and decisions, and fair treatment.

Direct Influences are those that occur as a result of face-to-face interaction between patients and their healthcare providers. The main objective here is to employ good communication techniques.

- **Address the patient cordially** – Call them by name, make eye contact, don’t rush, and smile. It’s amazing how defenses go down when people feel safe and accepted. Introductions and good-byes provide a first and “last” impression. Say “Thank you”, “Have a nice day,” or other positive remark to end the visit.
• **Wear a nametag** – ALL staff should have a nametag with at least a first name and basic title so the patient can easily refer to them by name, too. It’s also helpful to point to the tag during introductions as it reinforces familiarity. A nametag also offers security that the provider is an actual employee.

• **Positive Scripting** – When staff members share something positive about the physician or hospital department, it helps patients form positive perceptions. For example: “Dr. Smith will be in to see you shortly. She is very thorough.” Or, “You will be going to radiology for some tests. Our department is well known for being state-of-the-art.”

• **Tell the patient what to expect, and what you expect of him/her.** Let patients know what the process will be, timelines, and other pertinent information they should be aware of. Additionally, share what you are doing, even if you are just writing notes in their chart, so they receive proper cues as to what to do. Providing a written summary, instructions, and patient education handouts will also help instill what you have conveyed to the patient, and can increase patient compliance while demonstrating care.

• **Stay true to your word.** If you promise to come back “shortly” do so within 20 minutes. Return phone calls as promptly as possible, and fulfill requests in a timely manner. These may sound simple, but they can make a big difference in the level of patient satisfaction.

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**UNCOMMON COURTESY**

Overall, patient satisfaction relates back to common courtesy and communication. As society, and healthcare in particular, became more demanding, courtesy became increasingly uncommon. When people are hurt, sick, or in a vulnerable state, they are more sensitive and have less patience. In order to provide them with the assistance they need, in a manner that is productive, review the indirect and direct influences you and your practice have on patient satisfaction, and make the changes that are necessary. Your patients, staff, and business will all benefit.

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**TL CONNECT**

What special activities do you engage in to increase patient satisfaction?

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**RESOURCES**

