

How to Ensure Patient Satisfaction During a 10-Minute Encounter

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Medical providers often underestimate the importance of patient satisfaction. Executives in corporate settings understand the value and impact personal recommendations can make in the success or failure of a product. If one extraverted person likes your product, that could lead to significantly increased sales for your business. With the current trends in social media, as well as increasing numbers of review websites like Yelp, the importance of patient satisfaction should no longer be underestimated by the medical community. An encounter that is perceived by the patient in a positive light can quickly lead to increased patient volume for the practitioner. An encounter that was perceived as negative can rapidly ruin both your personal and your practice's reputation. It can take a long time, and a lot of headaches, to repair just one online negative review.

Here are some suggestions to ensure that your patient encounters will be perceived as positive:

1 Always smile when you greet patients. It seems simple, but in the middle of a busy and stressful day, it is easy to forget these basic social intimacies. You would be surprised how this little act can change a patient's perception of the encounter. A simple smile will help set the tone and make your patient feel at ease. Feeling comfortable will open the lines of communication and encourage a smooth exchange with your patient.

2 Always leave the room slowly. You can enter quickly and start your exam or procedure, because patients expect you to be busy when entering the room. However, giving them 1-2 minutes of undivided attention at the end of the encounter allows them time to ask questions and allows them to leave feeling more confident about the visit. A great way for the patient to perceive that you spent a lot of time with them is to take a seat during the patient encounter. This will force you to focus on your patient, and communicate more efficiently with them. Always allow your patients to ask questions openly and be sure to take your time while educating them. If the patient feels like their concerns were heard, this may determine whether they perceive the encounter in a positive light or not. Patients will often seek another provider if they feel that you did not give them 100% of your attention. The second provider may not do anything different than you in regard to the patient's work-up or treatment, but by listening and providing a little extra attention, the patient may leave feeling more satisfied from that encounter.

3 Make a brief note about the patient's personal life. You can spend only 5 minutes with someone, but if you ask them about their vacation or their daughter's wedding, they will feel like you really care about them as a person and they will remember the encounter in a positive way. Medical care and the patient/provider relationships are very personal. As medical providers, we often have to ask people for intimate personal information, or to show areas of their bodies that make them uncomfortable, and it can be easy to forget how scary and intimidating it is to entrust your health to someone else. A personal touch and taking a few extra

minutes to focus are just a few ways to really evolve this trusting relationship. Communicating on a personal level is appreciated by patients and helps ease anxiety during the visit.

4 Along similar lines, be sure to allow patients the opportunity to talk about themselves. Ask your patients any question and let them talk... "crazy weather we are having don't you think?", "What are you doing for the Super Bowl/Valentine's Day/4th of July", "I just can't get used to this daylight savings time, how about you?" You can perform your exam or procedure while they are talking, they will feel less pain (aka: "talkesthesia") and they will remember you in a more positive way. This "talkesthesia" will often enable a level of comfort that helps ensure the patient will follow up as recommended. Procedures are part of our daily work as providers, but we have to remember that for most patients this is not a daily or "normal" activity, and is often scary and anxiety provoking. For many patients, the anxiety about a procedure can be worse than the procedure itself. So, talking about oneself can make a big difference on how they perceive a procedure in the end.

5 Always compliment patients. It doesn't matter if it is their hair, shoes, purse, work promotion, etc. This works for both male and female patients. Simple courteous steps like this will go a long way in life and relationships; and certainly carries over into our PA/patient relationships.

These 5 tips should not slow down your clinical work, although they may seem simple, and maybe even silly, they will improve your patient's outcome and their perception of the

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time you spend with them. A few extra minutes spent to make someone feel comfortable might also lead to discussions about important information that is relevant to their health. They might mention a symptom or a social behavior that would otherwise have not been mentioned during that encounter. The more information that you gather, the more effective a clinician you will be. The more comfortable your patient is during the encounter, the more they will be willing to disclose personal details about their health.

The combination of your data gathering and your patients' comfort level will lead to increased patient satisfaction. This will lead to successful relationships between you, your patient, and your SP! Hopefully these tips will help increase your effectiveness, your patient satisfaction and your overall practice goals! ■

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3. Contra Costa Clinicians Association

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4. San Francisco Bay Area Physician Assistants (SFBAPA)

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7. Northcoast Association of Advanced Practice Clinicians

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9. Stockton Midlevels

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10. Journal Club for PAs and NPs (Fresno area)

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