

Customer Service Skills in the Medical Office

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Imagine being a patient in your office....

- * Would you feel welcomed? Or would you feel like a bother?
- * Would you feel safe and private? Or would you feel like the whole office is talking about you while you wait in the exam room?
- * Would you feel valued? Or would you feel like a number?
- * Would you feel noticed? Or would you feel invisible?

Healthcare IS a business.

- * Patients have more choices now than ever for medical services
- * Medical practices rely on referrals and word of mouth reviews for new patients and retaining old patients.
- * Social media is EXTREMELY powerful. Bad reviews on the internet can totally destroy a business—including a provider's medical practice.
- * For every GOOD review, there are three bad ones.

Objectives

- * Identify the hallmarks of good customer service in the medical office
- * Recognize the differences with customer service in the medical office
- * Identify where good customer service in the medical office begins
- * Identify “killer” words and phrases
- * Identify “kinder” words and phrases
- * Understand that, in healthcare, good customer service IS patient care.

5 Qualities of Excellent Customer Service

- * **Know your product (patient care)**
- * --know your office's protocols
- * --know your company's protocols
- * --know more than the basics of your day to day tasks
- * --know MORE (continuing education)
- * --know your patients themselves

5 Qualities of Excellent Customer Service

- * **Listen and learn**
- * --Just because it is a similar conversation to others, does not mean it is the SAME
- * --Actively listen without interrupting
- * --Understand what is being asked of you
- * --Follow up to review and confirm next steps and expectations

5 Qualities of Excellent Customer Service

- * **Practice Patience with our Patients**
- * --We never want to make our patients feel that they are a burden
- * --Patients should be made comfortable that they are asking us for help
- * --Extra patience with our elderly patients who may not be tech savvy or who may not move as fast
- * --Most patients are not well when coming into office

5 Qualities of Excellent Customer Service

- * Go Above and Beyond
- * --Patient satisfaction comes from us going the extra mile (walking patient to check out desk, handing them educational materials, procuring medication samples, etc.)
- * --Anticipate problems and seek solutions prior
- * --Look for opportunities to do MORE than just the basics for our patients

5 Qualities of Excellent Customer Service

- * **Conscious Professional Communication**
- * --Positive and clear tone of voice
- * --Wear a smile (or “smizing” while wearing masks)
- * --Speak to patient like you want to be spoken to
- * --Turn negative phrases into positive phrases
- * --Help make your words understood (annunciate, speak at a moderate pace, etc)
- * --Avoid slang, swearing, etc
- * (Source: <https://www.associationservicesgroup.net/blog/5-qualities-excellent-customer-service>)

How Customer Service is Different in Healthcare

- * Our “product” is PEOPLE and their health
- * Patients generally have a health concern (problem) when visiting and/or calling the office
- * Patients want their problem solved quickly
- * Patients may have family members (adult children, spouses, etc.) advocating on their behalf, and can have high expectations to their loved one’s care
- * Our oversights and errors can have significant repercussions on our patients and their health

Where Does Customer Service Begin in the Medical Office?



Where Does Customer Service Begin in the Medical Office?

- * Before the patient steps into the office!!



Where Does Customer Service Begin in the Medical Office?

- * **FACT:** The person answering the phones in a medical office can make or break a practice. They are the first impression!

We are always “on stage”...



Where Does Customer Service Begin in the Medical Office?

- * ALL staff members should know how to properly answer the phone.
 - Greeting: “Good morning”
 - Thank the caller: “Thank you for calling Dr. Smith’s office”
 - Identify yourself: “This is Jeanette”
 - Ask how you can serve: “How may I help you?”

Where Does Customer Service Begin in the Medical Office?

- * Use your “phone voice”—answer with a smile. (It works, really!)
- * Not feeling particularly cheerful? Pretend like you are! Patients should not feel like they are bothering you when they call
- * Get the patient’s name and call them by name throughout the call. “With whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?”

“Hold, Please”



Front Office Staff—The Gatekeepers

- * Make patients feel welcome upon arrival
- * --Stand up to greet them, if possible
- * --Pay attention to the condition of the lobby
- * --Signs in the lobby should be minimal and positive

Front Office Staff—The Gatekeepers

- * Schedule Management
- * --Back office should keep front office informed of exam room delays
- * --Front office keeps patient informed on delays.
- * --If delay gets unusually long, give patients options (wait, leave and come back, or reschedule)

Handle Tough Patient Situations with HEART

- * **H—Hear**

- * --Listen without interrupting

- * --Ask questions to clarify

- * --Re-state the info provided: “What I hear you saying is...”

- * --Use positive non-verbal cues and body language

Handle Tough Patient Situations with HEART

- * **E—Empathize**
- * -- Be sensitive to the patient's experience
- * --Be understanding
- * --Treat the patient with respect

Handle Tough Patient Situations with HEART

- * **A—Apologize**

- * --Don't become defensive or shift blame to another
- * --An apology is not an admission of guilt—it's a way of showing concern
- * --Use first person: "I am sorry this happened to you. I want to help if I can."
- * --Customer satisfaction increases 10%-15% when the apology is genuine, and sounds genuine

Handle Tough Patient Situations with HEART

- * **R—Respond**

- * --Take ownership of the problem
- * --Explain why the problem occurred (if appropriate)
- * --Outline what you will do to fix the problem, and provide a timeline.
- * --If possible, list options for the patient on how best to resolve the issue
- * --If possible, provide atonement (reimbursement)

Handle Tough Patient Situations with HEART

- * **T—Thank**

- * --Always end by thanking the patient for sharing their concern. After all, if we don't know about it, we cannot fix it, and the patient walks away angry

Tips for the Back Office Staff

- * At discharge, give the patient something in their hand—a visit summary, patient education, medication samples, coupons for medications, etc.
- * Walk with the patient to the check out—don't point the way or give directions.
- * Respect the patient's privacy:
 - * --Don't announce their weight out loud
 - * --Don't start the intake until the exam room door is closed.

Words Have Power!

- * The words we use with our patients, providers, colleagues have great power.
- * Certain words and phrases can invoke feelings and emotions in those we are speaking to
- * Some words can seem innocent, but have hidden connotations.
- * In healthcare, we need to be particularly choosy with words in order to not cause the patient worry.

Words Have Power!

“Killer” Words/Phrases

- * “I don’t know”

“Kinder” Words/Phrases

- * “I don’t have the answer to that right now, but I will find out for you. Do you mind holding briefly?”

Words Have Power!

“Killer” Words/Phrases

- * “Please calm down”
- * --This is an insulting phrase, and demeans the patient

“Kinder” Words/Phrases

- * (After allowing patient to speak): “I can hear your frustration. I will do everything I can to help resolve this.”

Words Have Power!

“Killer” Words/Phrases

- * “I just work here”
- * “I don’t make the rules”
- * “I’m just doing my job”
- * “Sorry, this computer is so slow.”
- * (It represents your office in a negative light.)

“Kinder” Words/Phrases

- * “This is the policy/protocol of our office. It is to ensure every patient’s safety and comfort” (Giving the WHY behind something helps)
- * “Bear with me as I look up some information. It should only be a moment.”

Words Have Power!

“Killer” Words/Phrases

- * “I can’t do that”
- * “Unfortunately”

“Kinder” Words/Phrases

- * “As it turns out, I don’t have a 10:30 appointment today, but I DO have one tomorrow.”
- * “As it turns out, I don’t have any samples in the office at this time, but I do have a card to help you get your prescription for a very small copay.”

Words and Phrases to Eliminate Completely

- * “NO”
- * “Actually”
- * “Can I be honest with you?”
- * “Truthfully”
- * “You’re wrong.”
- * “It’s not my/our fault”
- * “I don’t understand”

Conclusion

- * As medical assistants, we have the power to uplift a patient, or to tear them down.
- * Let's use our power for GOOD—let's make it our goal to have our patient feel better that when they came in.
- * In healthcare, good customer service IS patient care.

Questions?

Some of My Best Friends
Are Medical
Assistants