

## Believe It or Not, You Affect Your Practice's Patient Retention

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Patient retention is all about four specific points: 1) First impressions: You don't get a second chance to make a first impression! 2) Relationships: How well do you build relationships with your patients? 3) Education: How well are you and your patients educated? 4) Attitude: How do you act toward your patients?

### First Impressions

The fact is ... first impressions matter! Although they can often be a poor determinant of someone's real personality, people usually never forget how others make them feel when they first meet them. Therefore, if the first contact you have with a patient is positive, it will make them feel comfortable and lead them to believe they have chosen the right office. If you speak and act like a true professional on the very first phone call, your potential patient will respond well.

Training the team is such an important aspect in the success of the practice simply because it makes each team player realize that attitude, behavior, self-confidence and respect are keys to patient compliance. That is why most successful offices practice what they preach. Everyone gets adjusted and continues to learn about chiropractic and the importance it has in their lives, both personally and professionally. This way, handling patients in every kind of situation becomes a piece of cake! Patient retention is the responsibility of the entire team - everyone is involved.

### Building Relationships

Relationship building may be the single most important process in why patients come to your office in the first place. Finding common bonds with your patients (or potential patients), making your practice the special chiropractic office in town, and meeting new people will keep your practice filled with new patients, solidify the relationships with existing patients and keep your current patients referring their families and friends.

Remember to stay positive, keep a smile on your face, even when you are on the phone - and train, train, train! One can never learn enough. In general, people who are similar tend to like each other, so connect with patients and people in your community. People naturally enjoy the feeling of belonging. So why not make your office a place where everyone wants to go?

### Be a Good Listener

Patients make all kinds of comments that the chiropractic assistant (CA) should be ready to address. It is important for the CA to know that certain comments are red flags. Red flags include comments such as: "I am feeling better, and I don't think I need to come in anymore," "I am feeling worse" or "My insurance has run out." Clearly, these statements should alert you that a patient may stop care. Regardless of the comments patients make, it is important that the team be educated and trained consistently so they have quick and accurate responses to any given situation.

## Patient Scheduling and Follow-Up

Multiple appointments make it easier for both the patient and the CA. Multiple appointments help a patient to not only keep their appointments, but also to schedule other events around their appointments, making their office visits a priority. Confirming new patients is not only a courtesy and a good service, but hopefully a guarantee that the new patient will actually keep their appointment and be on time. It is also a good idea to confirm special appointments such as a re-exam, report of findings, or even to remind patients who are consistently missing appointments or coming in late. Train your team to keep a log of missed appointments, and a list of patients who attend wellness workshops (HCC) and other special events. Tracking these types of behavior can be an important part of your patients' commitment to their health. By following up, it shows patients that the entire team is truly committed as well. Having a team that is authentic is a great way to keep patients engaged in the practice.

## Altercations

At times, staff may find themselves in situations that may be more difficult to address. Again, that is why training is so important. Confrontation does not have to be negative and can be handled quite easily. Role-playing and scripting are great ways to gain experience in various situations that may arise. Here are two example scenarios:

### Example 1

The patient states that they are feeling better after two treatments and want to cancel their next appointment.

*Response:* "I am so glad you are feeling better. Dr. Smith is such a fantastic chiropractor. So many times, our patients feel better before the problem is actually fixed. So, I will let the doctor know. He will probably want to spend a few extra minutes with you today, and you can discuss that with him."

### Example 2

I can't make another appointment at this time. I'm not sure of my schedule for next week.

*Response:* No problem. Since 3 p.m. seemed to work well for you today, I will put you down for Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 3 p.m. next week. And if for some reason that doesn't work, just call me and I will switch it for you.

Patient retention is one of the key factors in running a successful practice. As you can see, there are so many ways you can work on patient compliance. By giving a great first impression, building relationships with people in your community, educating, being a good listener and consistently staying on top of staff training, your practice will be sure to retain the patients you currently have!

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