



CHIROPRACTIC (GENERAL)

Are You Turning Patients Off?

Perry Nickelston, DC, FMS, SFMA

Patient satisfaction is more than just giving a great chiropractic treatment. That's what patients expect to get from you. They assume you are good; otherwise, you wouldn't have the degree hanging on your wall.

It's the small stuff that matters most. The little things we often neglect make the biggest impact on our business. Remember, it's a business first, so start treating it like one.

If things aren't going well, we look for huge leaks in the bucket when we should be looking for the pinholes.

Habits form that become the dysfunctional norm. In other words, you don't see what others see. You need to look at your protocols through the lens of your *patients*, not just what your business books or practice consultant tells you to do (and not even what I tell you to do). Here we go...

Mistake #1: Front-Desk Mismatch

Walk into any business establishment and get treated rudely (or worse, irreverently), and that business just killed an opportunity to make loyal fans. In a professional setting, it's crucial. Human beings crave value and appreciation. It's hardwired into our ancestry, imprinted on our DNA. If you don't get it, you remember. When you get it, you remember it, too.

Sadly, it's not a very common experience we get these days from businesses. It's truly incredible how good it makes you feel when someone smiles and acknowledges your presence, and sincerely thanks you for your business. Having a human connection in the digitized world today is like finding a unicorn. It just doesn't happen.



Your **front desk** is the front line of business success or failure. *Period.* Finding the right person for this job is not easy. The friendliest person in your office should be the first and last interaction patients see. I've been in doctors' offices where I wasn't even acknowledged for several minutes and no one smiled at me. I judged the doctor by his staff. So many offices act like they are doing you a favor, when you're actually doing them one by showing up.

Action Step: Hire for personality at the front desk above everything else. Send a friend in as a secret-shopper patient and have them share with you the experience from the first phone call to eventually seeing you. It's OK to have a checklist protocol for patients as they arrive, but don't take away your staff's ability to be in the moment with each individual person. You don't want clones.

Mistake #2: Being Too Serious

There is no correlation between appearing to be serious and actually being good at what you do. Who says you have to be serious when talking about serious subject matter? Don't be a cardboard-cutout doctor.

Remember, you are dealing with a living, breathing human being who is in pain. Part of every healing process is the ability to stay positive, laugh and smile, even in the face of adversity. You are forming a long-term relationship with your patients. You are not a surgeon who sees them once and then hopefully never again.

Action Step: Lighten up and stop taking yourself too seriously.

Mistake #3: Being Too Regimented

Patients can tell when you are going through the motions and are not fully present in the moment. Don't follow a script when talking to patients. Yes, you can practice how to deliver a great treatment plan and review of your evaluation findings, but absolutely do not become a clone.

If you find yourself saying the same thing to different people, this is a sign that you need to step back and be more authentic. In the quest to develop successful systems, we often forget that we are dealing with individual human beings. Being genuine comes down to truly being present in the moment, listening with intent, and not letting your body language suggest you are being rushed.

Action Step: Be yourself; don't try to conform to some vision you have of what a successful doctor behaves like. Before entering any treatment room, take a look at that name on the file and remember who you are going to be treating.

Mistake #4: Scheduling Blocks

When you start to become a more high-volume practice, it's easy to fall into the quicksand of overscheduling. This can be a practice disaster, especially if you have a history of spending a lot of time with patients when you were not as busy.

Sit down and take the time to look at your practice flow. Not everyone can see the same volume of people; much of it depends on your personality and anxiety threshold. If your treatment protocol includes 2-3 visits per week, you'd better make sure you see them on time. If you don't respect a patient's time, you will lose them in a hurry. And guess what? They will tell everyone else about it.

Action Step: Sit down with your staff and go over your current [scheduling](#) protocol. Ask their opinion about the flow. They are the ones on the front lines who have to deal with a chaotic schedule. Do you have a special spot for new patients, evaluations, exams, etc.? Are you making 15-minute blocks, when perhaps you need to go to 20? An extra five minutes here and there can make all the difference.

Mistake #5: Force-Feeding Education

Yes we know chiropractic can help all people; however not everyone has the same level of interest or passion in it. Bombarding new patients with too much, too soon can have a negative effect. Education is important, but you must keep in mind that not everyone is going to accept the paradigm.

Some patients may just want to come on in for pain relief and that's all. You have two choices at this point: respect that and keep them as patients or dismiss them as patients. It's ultimately your choice.

In our effort to educate people about the value of chiropractic, we may inadvertently alienate them more. Forcing them to come to a new-patient education class can backfire. No one likes to be told they must do something.

Action Step: Take a look at your office and evaluate the first impressions people could have. Begin relating to patients as individuals to become more targeted in your educational efforts. Contrary to popular opinion, there should not be a cookie-cutter approach to chiropractic education with the same brochures and handouts. And for goodness sake, update your material every now and then.

So there you have it. Remember, nothing in life changes until something moves. Your first assignment is to begin at least one action step. And yes, make your entire staff read this article, too. Why? Because you can't do it alone. Protocols are an absolute necessity for a successful system and thriving practice; just don't let them become business quicksand slowly pulling you under until it's too late.

