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Patient Retention Techniques

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When talking about techniques to grow your business, we tend to focus on the "large" aspect of the patient base, that is, on strategies to attract new patients. However, it is important to remember that "loyal" is equally, if not more, important. Why is that? Acquiring a new patient can cost five to sixteen times as much as retaining a patient.

Before discussing techniques to improve patient retention, it is important to understand why patients leave in the first place. Almost always, it comes down to poor service. In fact, up to 82% of consumers stopped doing business with an organization due to poor customer experience. For acupuncture clinics, common poor patient experiences may be: an uncomfortable treatment environment or an appointment not starting on time. Additionally, patients are often lost due to the failure of the clinic to follow-up to schedule additional appointments.

With some understanding of why patients leave, we can focus on how to get them to stay. Clearly, the most important factor in patient retention is superior service. This begins with the necessities: maintaining a highly knowledgeable staff and a focus on friendly, personalized experiences. First, you want to ensure that you have created a relaxing environment for the patient - hygienic, warm and overall comforting. You want your patient to associate your clinic with relaxation and a comfortable environment. Because each patient is different, be sure to ask if they are comfortable before beginning the treatment.

Along with a comfortable environment, you want offer a highly personalized service to your patient. While clinical basics of personalization involve understanding the patient's particular issue, you want to go above and beyond to demonstrate that the patient is important to you. One technique is to include personal notes along with treatment notes so that you can ask about children, offer them their favorite drink when they arrive, wish them a happy birthday or ask about a vacation they recently went on. Remembering important people and events can really make your patient feel special and that will keep them coming back.



While personalized service and a comfortable environment are important, often the most frustrating experiences for a patient happen outside of the treatment room. A professional clinic will reply to emails and phone calls in a timely manner. Not only is this important for showing the patient that you value them, but it is also important for booking appointments. Clinics are also trending towards self-serve options like online appointment scheduling, so the patient can book an appointment online at their own convenience. Lastly, something we have all experienced at one time or another is a prolonged wait in the clinic waiting room. It is important to respect your patient's time and keep your clinic operating on schedule.

On top of offering outstanding customer service, a clinic should be proactive in booking follow-up appointments. That means not relying on the patient to remember to book their next appointment, but rather reaching out to them yourself. The best technique for booking additional appointments is to ask the patient to schedule their next visit as they are leaving their appointment. For those that opt not to book right away, many clinics make use of recall post cards. Recall cards are mailed to patients and often contain information on the health benefits of acupuncture, that they are due for their next appointment and where they can call or go online to book their next appointment. Practice management software will often automatically keep track of which patients are due for their next appointments and even email them on your behalf.

It is also important to stay in contact in between appointments. To do this, many clinics have adopted use of social media like Facebook or Twitter, as well as email newsletters. By frequently sharing your expertise, along with relevant and interesting articles and clinic promotions, patients will have repeated exposure to your brand, which may lead to increased appointments.

Lastly, it is important to ask for feedback. The only way to really know what you are doing well and what could use improvement is to ask your patients directly. Satisfaction surveys are great at capturing this data, but you will also want to talk directly with your patients (and especially with those that left).

While lost patients are inevitable, with a clinic-wide focus on a great customer experience and integrating smart business practices, your clinic can be truly successful.

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