

Getting a YES: An Effective Strategy for Overcoming Patient Objections

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Patients make more excuses for declining care from an acupuncturist than perhaps any other type of doctor. Various reasons hold them back from making a commitment to care. You all have heard the excuses of costs, frequency of visits, the length or timing of a treatment plan, and even the commute to your office. Or perhaps patients tell you, "I have to speak to my spouse first," or "Let's wait till after the holidays." It's human nature to resist doing something new, even for the better. But imagine what would happen if you grew your patient base by 80 percent. It would affect:

- Referrals.
- Number of office visits per week.
- Number of new patients needed per month.
- Ease and satisfaction in practice.
- Overall collections.
- Savings on marketing for new patients every month.

Regardless of where or how you practice, the possibility of growth is imminent. When patients complain about your fees or concerns such as the frequency of visits, many acupuncturists try to "fix" the problem and avoid rejection by reducing care fees and recommendations. Both of these approaches devalue the acupuncturists services or initial recommendations. Neither leaves patients with a high-quality impression. The secret? The excuses you hear are rarely the real reasons they're declining your care. So consider a simple, nonaggressive approach that works to effectively to change their mindsets.

To your patients, it's never just about relieving symptoms or conditions. The most important thing is getting them back to what they're missing in life because of their symptoms or conditions. Once you find out what the patient truly wants and is committed to as the reason for seeking your care, make sure you never stray from that end goal in all future communication. So when the patient brings up finances or a long commute as an excuse, instead of addressing their unease directly, simply acknowledge that you understand this is a real concern for them. That is step one.

Interestingly, if you delve deeper into their concern or rebuttal, you will only make it appear more legitimate in their eyes. And since it's often not the real reason the patient is hesitant, you're just enabling avoidance of the real issue. You are actually doing such patients a disservice.

Only after you genuinely acknowledge your patients' concerns do you focus on why they are really in your office. What are they actually dealing with? And not just the immediate concern — "my back hurts." What do they want next year when they are pain, sciatica, or migraine free? What will their days look like then? How much better will their lives be, and how serious are they about having that?

People will dedicate a couple extra minutes in a day or spend a few more dollars to attain what they really want in life. And if they are not so inclined, then they were never going to receive your

care anyway. They either just wanted someone to listen to them, or to hear your diagnosis or recommendations.

It's easy for someone to reject acupuncture, a payment or care plan, or even a certain acupuncturist. But it doesn't make sense for someone to reject his or her long-term goals. And if your care provides access to what a patient really wants, then that's the best solution.

Always stay focused on what the patient wants most deeply. This doesn't mean you have to drop your philosophy or clinical outcomes. See it as an opportunity to strategically combine them with the symptomatic and lifestyle outcome your patient is looking for. Because when the doctor and patient are on the same page, you can experience increased compliance, more referrals, and more reactivations without needing as many brand new patients, even in a growing practice.

So if you're having new patients decline your recommendations, this is an approach you've surely been missing. Not only does it work, but it's easier than other methods (i.e., trying to persuade, accepting barter invites, making deals, or lowering fees).

This process honors what a patient is dealing with and offers them an opportunity. And in this new era of acupuncture, we need to use communication and strategies that respect patients' mentalities, provide the best customer service possible, and always cater our care toward patients' true end goals.

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