

# Is Your Clinic Running Smoothly?

## EXAMINING YOUR PRACTICE FROM THE PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE

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We all want a practice that runs smoothly; a practice where patients and staff are happy - and those positive five-star Yelp and Google reviews just never stop coming. But sometimes, we are so caught up in the practice of our medicine that we may not completely have a handle on how the office is actually functioning. Here are a few tips to help you take a hard look at your practice from your patient's point of view.

### The First Contact

It's important to recognize what your patients see from the moment they come in contact with your practice. And that often begins with your website.

Have someone you trust who is not a patient or unfamiliar with your practice take a look at your website and ask them for feedback. Is your site easy to understand and navigate? If you offer appointments via your website, does that functionality work properly? Are there any error messages or broken links? Is there follow-up with the staff so appointments are confirmed and inquiries responded to in a timely manner?

It's critical that your website makes a good impression so people understand your practice and follow through with making an appointment via the site or by calling your office directly.

Have this same person call your office and make an appointment; then ask them for feedback. How were they greeted? Was your staff friendly and clear in communicating appointment options? Were they able to clearly answer questions? Did the staff put the caller on hold for a long time?

All of these seemingly small things leave a big impression when someone is first getting acquainted with your practice. It's important for you to know where the disconnects are so you can correct them and train (or even retrain) your staff (*or yourself*).

### Parking Lot & Waiting Room

Once you have made sure your appointment procedures and website are in top shape, take a stroll through your clinic's parking lot and see how things look. Remember, you're looking at things from your patient's perspective.

Is the parking lot full of potholes? Are the lines faded or are the parking spots clearly marked? Are there any tripping hazards you can see? What about cracked stairs, loose railings or uneven pavement?

It's important to get any potential liabilities taken care of. If you are renting your property, talk to the building owner about getting things repaired. You want your patients to come into a clean, safe and inviting environment from the moment they pull into your parking lot.

Now, step into your waiting room and really take a hard look around. Everything might look in order with little clutter, but take a *close* look at everything ... *and* sit in the chairs. Is any of the furniture broken or suffering from torn fabric? Take a look in the corners: are there dust bunnies? If you have a television in your waiting room, are there cords running along the floor that could cause a tripping hazard?

If you provide reading material, how outdated is it? If you provide coffee or water, is that area well stocked and well maintained; or is there spilled coffee and empty water bottles everywhere? Has the trash been taken out recently? You see your waiting room every day and may not even really notice if it needs a refresh.

All of these things are important to the patient experience. You may not really notice how run down or dirty your waiting room is until you really take a long, hard look at it. Sometimes, the fix is as easy as some new chairs, a new coffee maker, a fresh coat of paint and/or even a nice rug. It doesn't have to be expensive to create a calm and inviting space for your patients.

### The Intake Process

Next step: it's time to take a look at your intake process. Whether it's done by you or your staff, make sure the paperwork is clear and the process is streamlined for you / your staff and your patients. You don't want to be wasting anyone's time.

It's important for your patients to understand what information you will need from them right out of the gate. And it's important for you (and your staff) to have a clear process in place for how to handle this information, as it is the basis for establishing treatment.

### The Follow-Up

Now that you have taken a look at your practice from the top, it's time to see how your follow-through stands up to scrutiny. What processes do you have in place once your patients leave your office to make sure they are complying with treatment? Do you / your staff follow-up with a phone call post-treatment to make sure there are no questions or concerns? Do you send out a newsletter or electronic reminder about the next appointment? What are you doing to make sure there is another touch point with your patients?

All of the above helps to ensure compliance with treatment; and builds a rapport with your patients that keeps you at the top of their mind when it comes to their health care needs and questions.

### Training & Communication

Whether you are a solo practitioner or you have a large staff, communication and training are the keys to your success. That includes training and reminding *yourself* about all the touch points of your practice, and taking a periodic look at things through your patients' eyes. It also includes training your *staff*, if you have staff, as to expectations and procedures; as well as training your *patients* as to what they can expect and remaining consistent in those practices.

Understanding how your patients see your practice keeps your office running on all cylinders, and lets everyone involved in the success of your practice (first and foremost, your patients) know that even the little details don't escape your notice.

NOVEMBER 2022