

Evaluate Your Practice: Quality Control

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How do your patients view your practice? Are you sure your practice is presenting the image, service and quality care you desire? For both new and established practices, periodic quality control evaluations are essential. You should conduct a quality control evaluation every four to six months, or when you have seen a recent downturn in patient visits to your office. You could ask a colleague or friend who is not familiar to your office to pose as a new patient. Ask this evaluator to use the following list of quality control points when reviewing your office. You may be surprised that what you find may save and enhance your practice.

Another option is to interview several patients who have been to the office recently. Using this same list, ask for their opinions on each point. In this case, a neutral third-party reviewer (such as another acupuncturist outside of the practice) should conduct the interview. Assuring patient anonymity will more fully reveal their likes and dislikes.

I. First Contact

A. How did you find out about the office? Word of mouth; telephone book; radio ad; TV ad; newspaper ad; flyer/handout; other

B. Was the address and/or phone number clearly indicated on the advertisement?

C. When contacting the office by telephone, were you greeted by a friendly voice?

1. Phone etiquette a) Name of the office b) "Can I help you" or "How can I help you?"
2. Was the person knowledgeable enough about the office and its procedures to be able to assist you? Were any words, phrases or statements made that were offensive or made you think you did not want to go to this office?
3. Were you placed on hold frequently, or for a long time?
4. When you were on hold, was there background music or a signal to let you know you were on hold? Was this entertaining or uncomfortable to listen to?
5. Were all your questions about the office answered?
6. Were the directions to the office clear (i.e., by car, bus, etc.)?
7. Were you told where to park? Did the office tell you if they validate parking? Were you told what time to arrive prior to the appointment so that forms could be completed? Were you told to bring insurance forms? Was a brief inquiry made as to the nature of your visit (i.e., was it a work-related injury, auto accident, health visit, etc.)?
8. Were you told the amount of time the first visit would take and what type of payment to bring (i.e., pay in advance - cash practice, bill the insurance company, or lien with your attorney)?

9. Did you have a clear image as to how you would get to the office and what to expect?

D. If there was no one in the office, was your call taken by the answering service promptly? Were they friendly and accurate with your questions? Did they know the office hours and location? Did they say when the doctor would contact you (i.e., "The doctor will call you back in the morning. They're in at 8:00 AM. If this is an emergency, I can reach him/her now.")?

E. How long did it take for your call to be returned (i.e., hours, days, weeks, etc.)? Did you have to call back due to no response from the office?

II. First Impression of the Office

A. Did you have any trouble locating the office? Were street signs clearly marked? Is the office address clearly visible from the street? Is the office sign clearly displayed? Were the landmarks given as directions over the telephone truly noticeable?

B. Did the directions get you to the office as you expected?

C. Was parking easy to locate?

D. Was the receptionist's window easy to locate once you were in the office?

E. Did the receptionist greet you immediately?

1. Did the receptionist look cheerful and pleasant, like they enjoyed being there?
2. Did they ask you to sign in? Did they give you instructions regarding filling out forms and where you could sit to complete them (i.e., "Can I help you? Please sign in and complete these forms. You may sit in the waiting area and return the forms when you have completed them. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me.")?
3. Were the instructions clear? Did you feel welcomed?

F. Was there a place to sit in the waiting area?

G. Was the decor pleasant?

1. Was the furniture; paintings; wall color; plants; color combinations; carpet; music; lighting; reading material (educational material on Oriental medicine and general topics) clean and neat?
2. Would you feel comfortable sitting in this room for a while?

III. The Examination

1. Were you seen right away, or did you have to wait a long time?
2. Were you greeted as Mr. or Ms. by the receptionist/nurse when you were escorted to the back office area?
3. Did you view a video that oriented you to the office and what to expect on your first visit (and subsequent appointments)? Did the video contain any wording that was offensive or frightened

you about receiving care?

4. When you were in the examination room, was the temperature comfortable? Did the nurse/receptionist clearly explain the instructions for changing your clothes? Did the nurse/receptionist close the door to allow you to change? Was the examination room's decor pleasant?
5. Were the examination gowns comfortable and clean? Did the examination room have reading material? Was there a place to sit? How long did you wait for the doctor to arrive?
6. When the doctor entered the room, did he/she knock first before entering? Did the doctor introduce him/herself and greet you as Mr. or Ms.? Did the doctor shake your hand? Was the doctor well-dressed (i.e., clean clothes and shoes) and well-groomed? Did the doctor have good oral hygiene? Did the doctor appear to have familiarized him/herself with your case prior to entering the room? Did the doctor review your history and ask if there were any questions? Did the doctor ask if you had ever been to an acupuncturist before? If this was your first visit to an acupuncturist, did the doctor talk to you about any fears or concerns? Was a pleasant rapport established?
7. During the examination, did the doctor give clear instructions? Did the doctor seem organized? Was he/she interrupted by telephone calls, the receptionist, or seeing other patients? Did the doctor say anything that cause you to question his/her ability as a doctor, or that was offensive? Did the doctor appear to be concerned and sympathetic to your aches and pains?
8. Did the examiner explain the preliminary findings and the need, if indicated, for additional tests? Were those tests explained well or mentioned in the orientation tape? Were the tests performed quickly, and with clear instructions? Were you told the results of the test, or were you told that the tests were to be sent out for interpretation and that you would be notified when the results came back?
9. Was a working diagnosis explained to you with treatment options? Were you told how the doctor would proceed with your case? Did the doctor explain the frequency of your visits, length of each visit, and what to expect as a treatment plan? Were you told what you are expected to do when away from the office (i.e., exercises, stretching, diet, changes in body mechanics, etc.)?

IV. Leaving the Office

1. Were you told to change into your clothes and given instructions to make an appointment at the front desk before leaving? Did the doctor close the door after leaving the examination room? When you went to the front desk, did the receptionist know how many treatments to schedule for the next week (i.e., did the doctor inform the receptionist of the treatment frequency while you were changing)? Were you given a card with the office location, phone number and appointment time for the next visit(s)? Was your financial obligation addressed tactfully? Was your parking ticket validated?
2. Did you leave feeling you had been helped? Were you in a place where there were caring people? Do you feel you used your time productively by going to this office? Would you go back? Would you recommend this office to others?

This list gives you or the evaluator a place to begin appraising your office, your staff, and your professional rapport with the patients you see each day. The smallest thing may make the difference between keeping a patient and losing them to another practice. Using this list, and based on what you hear from the patient via the evaluator, you can make changes and watch your practice grow.

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