

15 Ways to Improve Patient Satisfaction

Do your patients feel good about their experiences at your practice and the care they receive? Increasingly, physicians will be measured and rewarded based on their levels of patient satisfaction. Moreover, positive patient experience is directly tied to higher quality and lower overall costs of care which together form healthcare's critical Triple Aim.

Here are some tips for increasing patient satisfaction:

Expand patient access and connection with the practice

1. Have someone answer patient calls 24/7.
2. Offer nontraditional office hours, including evenings and weekends. Strive to provide patients with an appointment at the time they want it, with the provider they want to see.
3. Provide sick appointments within 24 hours. Use a robust, standardized scheduling platform to help ensure availability. The system should be capable of providing feedback, such as the number of sick appointments and well visits, enabling the practice to address scheduling needs.
4. Have nurse practitioners (NP) or physician assistants (PA) available to patients by phone. Offload other tasks to NPs and PAs, freeing the physician to spend more time with patients.
5. Provide a user-friendly, online patient portal. It should enable patients to schedule appointments, view test results (once the physician has discussed them with the patient), send questions to the provider and receive answers. Structure the portal carefully to ensure timely, effective communication between patient and practice.
6. Provide care coordinators and navigators for patients with the greatest needs.
7. Reduce excessive waiting room times. Practices need to examine their workflows to increase efficiency.



Engage and educate patients

8. Educate patients about their condition, what they need to do, and when to contact the provider. When a patient is discharged from the hospital or other inpatient facility, schedule a follow-up appointment within 24 to 48 hours and review discharge instructions with them.
9. Build relationships with your sickest patients. Consider the patient's condition when determining the frequency of contact. For example, call an older, less stable patient more frequently. Contact a younger patient with knee replacement surgery, for instance, less often – perhaps monthly. Ask the patient what they want, too, in terms of call frequency. A nurse or care coordinator can handle these calls.
10. Stay focused on the patient during office visits. Don't allow interruptions except for true emergencies. Spend a few minutes engaging with the patient before starting any computer documentation. Ask how the patient is doing and what their goals are for the visit. If you can't accomplish the patient's goals during the visit, explain what you will do for the next visit. Before ending the appointment, ask the patient if you've answered all their questions.



Invest in the right employees

11. Hire great front-desk staff who are friendly, caring, patient and polite.
12. Provide wages that are commensurate with your high customer service standards.
13. Make sure the staff understands your customer service focus. Address any performance issues right away.



Make care more affordable

14. Discuss patients' financial concerns related to their care. Help them reduce out-of-pocket costs through mail-order prescriptions and in-network referrals, and when possible, prescribe tests and drugs that are less costly than comparable options.
15. Provide care coordination services, which can include social workers to help patients overcome financial barriers. Care coordination can also help avoid duplication of tests and other unnecessary services.



These tactics will help keep patients connected to the primary care provider (PCP), allowing the delivery of preemptive care and therefore avoiding expensive acute episodes. Engaging and educating patients, increasing access, and improving the patient experience will result in higher quality outcomes and lower overall costs of care.

To learn how Continuum Health can help your practice enhance patient satisfaction and meet other critical goals for success, please contact Devon Renzi at 856.782.3300 x2419 or drenzi@continuumhealth.net.