

BEGIN RIGHT...STAY RIGHT

Increasing Patient Retention



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Customer retention, which is usually measured by repeat purchases or visits, plays a significant role in driving profits for any business. Businesses that excel in customer retention are usually positioned for long-term success and have a far greater competitive edge over their competition. Though there are various contributing factors to high customer retention, the most effective is providing superior customer service. Customer service is designed to create a positive customer experience in order to increase customer loyalty, which then leads to long-term customer retention.

Customers, who are loyal, will continue to do business with you whether or not you offer the best, lowest price or fastest delivery of your product or service. This is because the customer's perception is there is value in what they are receiving and how they received it. Focusing on providing a great experience with the right customers over time will improve the bottom line by creating the most loyal customers. Loyal customers can be counted on to build a solid base of revenue and help expand profits.

Studies state reducing customer defection by 5% can result in a profit increase of 25-100%. Studies also show by increasing customer loyalty and retention up 2%, the profitability is equivalent to that of cutting operational cost by 10%.

Some may believe if we lose a customer and gain a new one, then nothing has been lost and the two "even out." The truth is however, it costs at least five times more to obtain new customers than it does to retain customers you already have.

At UCLA Health System, retaining our patients starts with making sure they appear for their scheduled appointment. Unfortunately, when patients fail to complete their course of treatment, not only can the patient suffer, but revenue is also lost from those unfulfilled visits. By following some simple steps, you can help address the causes of patient no-shows and increase your practices' retention rate.

Increase the Energy Level

When a patient is involved in repeated

visits for treatment such as physical therapy or counseling they could be in low spirits regarding the effects of their condition. Depressing surroundings could make it more difficult to endure the treatment, whereas an environment filled with optimism and energy are usually viewed as comfortable and refreshing. Take a look at your practice from a "patient eye" view. Do they feel excited about their scheduled appointment or is it distressing for patients during check in?

First consider your basic surroundings. Does your practice site need a paint job, artwork, or plant life to make it feel more welcoming? Next, work with your staff to review the entire patient experience. The patient experience usually begins with a reminder call or letter patients receive about their appointment. Is it bland or does it communicate that you are grateful to have the patient scheduled for a visit? When patients check in, are they greeted with a smile, personable welcome, or do they get a casual glance from a disinterested receptionist?

Patients should be greeted by name and asked questions related to their current healthcare needs. At the end of the appointment, thank patients for coming and provide them an explanation of what may come next.

Sell the Sizzle, Not the Steak

Anyone in the world of sales will tell you to sell the benefits of your product, not the features. The same is true for your practice. Patients do not come to get treatment; they come to get better. For example, if you are a physical therapist, avoid telling patients about doing bends, stretches and lifts. Instead, talk about increasing strength, flexibility and coordination. Always repeat the benefits of what you are doing with the patient. Help them also see that what they are doing for treatment has merit.

Prevent that First No-Show

Patients sometime feel the urge to cancel or no-show an appointment for various reasons. If a patient misses their first appointment, this increases the chances of the patient canceling and no-showing again in the future. Do everything you can to prevent that first no-show. Make reminder phone calls or send reminder

emails to patients. Be sure to mention what the patient should do if they need to cancel or reschedule. Also, reinforce and remind patients the importance of consistent attendance to every appointment.

Forgive and Move On

Some patients might not show up for an appointment because they are embarrassed, scared, or uncomfortable with their condition. Maybe they did not do the self monitoring tests, recommended exercises, or did not show up to their last appointment. Someone from the practice should follow up with each patient who misses an appointment by calling to find out the reason and encourage the patient to attend the next scheduled session.

Make Your Patients Feel at Home

For patients that will be coming in for multiple visits, give them a brief office tour. Introduce them to your peers. Show them where the restrooms are and where they can go for refreshments. Make them feel at home. Display staff photos and memorabilia in work areas to create opportunities for the staff to share a little about them. Anything you can do to connect with your patients will always strengthen patient relationships and retention.

Show Your Appreciation

With email, e-cards and instant messenger these days, it seems our society has forgotten the power of a Thank You card. Consider sending Thank You cards to five patients that you encounter each day. Not only do they display good manners, Thank You cards also show patients that we understand they are busy and we appreciate them taking the time to come in. Go a step further, by handwriting a personal message. This makes the card's message seem more sincere and therefore, the card has a greater impact.

The ability of a company to create value for its customers is the key to long-term customer loyalty and retention. Utilizing these simple steps can enhance both your patient retention and your overall quality of care. ♦

Resources:

The Loyalty Effect: The Hidden Force Behind Growth, Profits, and Lasting Value, Frederick Reichheld | *Customer Loyalty*, Bain & Company | *5 Tips to Increase Patient Retention*, Practice Management Group | *The Power of the Thank You Note*, www.whymarket.com

SCRIPTS FOR SUPERIOR SERVICE

Meaningful Responses

Common Patient Statements/Situations	Your Response
When a patient says, "Sorry to bother/interrupt you..."	"Of course you are not a bother."
When a patient ask a question regarding the practice, visit, etc.	"I am glad you asked that...."
When noise level is elevated in and around the exam room.	"Our patients are resting. Can you please help us keep it quiet?"
When a patient says, "Oh, just one more thing..."	Stop what you are doing face the patient and listen attentively.

Negatives Statements into Positives Ones

Instead of Saying...	Say...
☹ No, I don't have time right now.	😊 Yes! I can help you in ___ minutes.
☹ We're short staffed.	😊 We may be busy, but we're never too busy to help you.
☹ I don't know.	😊 That's a good question. Let me find out.
☹ I can't do that.	😊 This is what we can do...
☹ That's not my job.	😊 Let me help you find someone who can help.
☹ No.	😊 Unfortunately that [request] is not possible.

Patient Exam Interaction

Entering a Exam Room
Step 1: Knock
Step 2: Acknowledge patient
Step 3: Introduce yourself (if you have not already interacted with the patient)
Step 4: Advise of your purpose
Step 5: Explain step by step each procedure avoiding clinical terms
Closing the Exam Room Door or Pulling the Curtain
Step 1: Advise the patient what you are doing is for their privacy and the privacy of others
Step 2: Ask the patient if there is anything you can do to make them more comfortable

