50 Customer Service Ideas to Treat Your Patients to Friendly, Easy and Unexpected Service

Here’s a companion piece to my recent list “50 Ways to Attract New Patients to Your Practice.” Once a patient makes an appointment to see your provider, be sure to keep them coming back by wowing them with your customer service.

FRIENDLY

1. Introduce yourself to patients. “Hi, I’m Jane and I am Dr. Smith’s assistant and I’ll be working with you today.”
2. Wear a visible and readable name tag with your first name in large letters.
3. Smile and speak to all patients, family members, and vendors in the practice. If anyone has a question mark on their face or is hesitating, be sure and ask “May I help you?”
4. Always smile while speaking on the phone and always introduce yourself. “Good morning, Dr. Smith’s Practice, this is Jane. How may I help you?”
5. Providers should always shake hands with patients and others in the exam room. That first touch is so important!
6. New patients should receive a special welcome and should receive special attention, remembering that the patient doesn’t know how the practice works.
7. Have a patient information brochure that describes your practice’s services, providers, and policies on medication refills, after-hours services, filing insurance, filling out forms, and making payments.
8. Have multiple ways for patients to complete their registration information – forms mailed to them, online completion, completion in the practice at a computer kiosk, completion at the practice with personal help, or pre-registration by phone.

9. Ask patients how they would like you to communicate with them about lab/test results – telephone (home, work or cell), email, mail, phone retrieval and let them know (in writing if possible) when they should call if they haven’t heard from you.

10. Place tablets and pens in the waiting area so patients can write down questions for their provider while they are waiting.

11. Have computers in the waiting area for patients to use. Have Wifi for patients to use their own computers while waiting. Have instructions available for using the Internet to look up medical information and provide a written list of medical websites that your providers recommend. Place this information on your website.

12. Prior to touching a patient in the exam room, assistants and providers should wash or sanitize their hands and be sure the patient can see them doing it. Additionally, it’s good to say to the patient “Let me wash/sanitize my hands before I examine you.” so the patient knows you are practicing good infection control.

13. Provide staff with patient questions and preferred answers so everyone can answer most questions and no one tells patients “That’s our policy.”

14. Have a water fountain with cups in the reception area.

15. If you have a television in the reception area, make sure patients can change the channel or the volume.

16. Invite patients to become a friend of the practice on Facebook and communicate regularly with your patients keeping them up-to-date on practice news, health news and local events.

17. Pretend that every patient is a mystery shopper (and they are!) and treat them like a VIP.
18. Give patients a way to reach a real person on the phone, and a way to go through the automated attendant. Remember that not every patient wants or needs the same thing.

19. Have an annual open house or patient appreciation day and do blood pressure checks or home safety checklists. Serve healthy snacks and visit with your patients.

20. Call 2 days before the patient’s appointment and remind them of the date and time of the appointment. Ask them to press “1” if they plan to keep the appointment and “2” if they would like to cancel the appointment.

21. When the patient is checking out, ask “Were all your questions answered today?”

22. If you give out wrapped candies, make sure to supply sugar-free candies as well as regular.

**EASY**

1. Have multiple ways for patients to complete their registration information – forms mailed to them, online completion, completion in the practice at a computer kiosk, completion at the practice with personal help, or pre-registration by phone.

2. If your parking lot is shared with other businesses, make sure there are parking spaces marked specifically for your patients.

3. Use wayfinding systems to help patients navigate around your practice. Many patients will not read signs, but will identify symbols or pictures if you explain the system. Use themes for providers or services to help patients find their way when coming out of the bathroom or lab. Carpet or tile designs and art pieces can also be used creatively to direct patients in and out.

4. If you have a choice, front-load your practice space with patient rooms and leave the furthest rooms for non-patient activities such as offices and staff rooms.
5. Give patients their medication list and problem list on a wallet-sized card.
6. Bring services to the patient exam room instead of having your patients move around the practice.
7. Offer numerous payment options including financial assistance, Medicaid enrollment, medical loans, checking account drafts through debit cards and credit card drafts.
8. Offer a “chat with the insurance lady” feature on your secure portal.
9. Have new patient pre-appointments for patients to meet with staff to take baseline vitals, log medications and prep chart prior to their first visit.
10. Have maps available for patients for any place you might be referring them to, whether in town or out of town.
11. Give patients a sheet to take with them that lists medication changes, future appointments, referrals and has a place for them to write down questions between appointments.
12. Give patients a customized sheet that shows the name of their medication, what the medication looks like and how to take the medication.
13. Send patients emails or letters and post on your website any information relating to hot topics in the news—vaccines, radiation exposure, etc.
14. Make your website a one-stop destination for practice information, health information, practice forms and secure messaging with the practice.

**UNEXPECTED**

1. If a patient has a particularly unhappy experience in your practice: a long wait, a mixed-up appointment, give them a gift card with a sincere apology.
2. Hand-write an apology to a patient who has had an bad experience with a staff member.
3. Validate parking for patients if they have to pay to
park to come to your practice.
4. Ask patients to rate your service – have forms in the exam rooms and in the waiting room and in new patient packets and on your website.
5. If your practice is near a shopping or eating area, give patients a pager to buzz or ring when it is time to see the provider.
6. Use your EMR or voice recognition to complete the patient’s medical record and print them a copy of it to take with them when they leave the exam room.
7. Have a blanket warmer to give patients who are sick, or have come in on a gurney a warm blanket.
8. Go through the daily obituaries to know when patients have passed and send condolences to the family.
9. Have an option on your phone system to speak to the manager and take complaints personally. Answer all complaints and call any patients back who leave messages, and any patients that employees tell you had a problem at the practice.
10. Call new patients the day after their appointment to see if they had any questions after their first visit.
11. Call particularly sick patients the day after an appointment to see if they are improving. (Thanks to Kristen Baird.)
12. Give patients who call a benchmark for when they will hear back from you (2 hours for same-day visits, 6 hours for questions, etc.) and exceed your own benchmarks.
13. Have a mystery shopper come to your practice and tell you what you don’t know about your practice.
14. Send your patients a birthday card.

What do you do in your practice that is Friendly, Easy for patients or Unexpected?