

Dear Mary Pat: What Should I Do About a Doctor Who Is Late for His Patients Every Day?

☒ Generally, doctors either think it's okay to be late (and usually are) OR they don't think it's okay to be late and only are in rare cases. That's who they are as people, just like us, and it's rare to be able to change them.

What I usually find is that certain patients are okay with doctors who are late, and will wait as long as it takes to see that doctor. Others will not wait, and therefore, will not return. I would let new patients know that the doctor takes his time with patients and that he often runs late and see if they can live with that. If that can't, then they should be scheduled with another doctor or seek care elsewhere. If the doctor has a problem with that, he needs to know that a good practice manages patients' expectations and that patients deserve to know that he typically does not run on time, and not have a surprise when they come to the practice.

One thing that is helpful is a very skilled nurse or assistant who keeps the doc on track so that he doesn't run any later than necessary if he gets easily distracted.

I have seen some practices give patients beepers to page them when the doctor is ready so they don't have to sit in the waiting room (especially with a sick child) any longer than necessary. You could also tell patients that someone will call them 20 minutes before their appointment – it's hard to have someone keep track of this and do all the calling – but it might be worth it if it keeps the patients and the doctor happy.

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