

# Guest Author: Denise Price Thomas Talks About Being a Mystery Patient and the View from “The Other Side of the Desk”

✘ *Welcome Denise Price Thomas, practice administrator (32 years) and consultant. Throughout her career, Denise has been passionate about creating positive experiences for patients and customers. She enjoys teaching customer service and effective communication. She strives to inspire others by using heart-warming stories and humor gleaned from her management experience in her informational, inspirational and motivational presentations. In addition, “Gladys Friday” (aka Denise), completes the package of “Health, Hope & Humor” by telling entertaining stories about funny moments in health care settings.*

I received a call from a practice administrator who said, “When I am observing the front desk staff, I find them to be helpful and attentive to our patients, however when the patients are visiting with the physician, he receives multiple complaints per day. I cannot be with them at all times.” This is so true as is in many practices. The staff is on their best behavior when the administrator, manager or physician is around.

After meeting with the administrator and physicians, it was decided that they were in need of a practice evaluation, to see how things look “from the other side of the desk.”

I was to be there at 10:00 am. The administrator and physicians were aware but they had elected to keep the

surprise to themselves.

I arrived to find the sliding window CLOSED. Although it was a clear glass (thinking the person on the other side could actually SEE through it) I just knew it would open...it didn't. In fact, nothing happened. The receptionist was "busy" writing and her head was down. As I stood there waiting "patiently" (as she thought I WAS a patient), I looked around at all of the real patients, looking through magazines – angrily flipping pages. I could tell immediately that they had been greeted in the same manner. There were loud sighs, eyes rolling as they looked at their watch; people were not happy.

After giving it a few minutes, I decided to tap on the CLOSED window. Still without looking up, she said, "I'll be with you in a moment!" After waiting another minute or so...I decided to put on my brave suit and go for it. I slid the CLOSED window open and said, "May I see your administrator please?" (still trying not to give it away). She said, (again without looking up – I still have NOT seen her eyes – nor has she seen mine) "M'AM, I SAID I would be with you in a minute!" I politely said, "thank you."

BINGO! I had located the trouble, when suddenly there appeared before me...the administrator. I was so happy to see her. She said, "Denise, come on back." She introduced me to the clinical staff and we made our way to the front desk. She said to the "greeter" at the front desk, "this is Denise, she will be performing a practice evaluation to see how we may improve our services." The "greeter" said, "It is SO NICE to meet you." No, it really wasn't. She decided at that point that she needed to be nice to me when she should have been NICER to her PATIENTS, the reason she was there.

Realizing that she wasn't really a "people person" to say the least, it was decided that she work in another area in the practice, where she was happier and the person from medical

records was much happier working with the patients.

End result, happier patients, happier physicians, happier staff.

Moral of this story: You can have the most wonderful physicians but if you have a sub-standard staff, patients will not be happy.

**Things to look for in a front desk applicant:**

**Fortune teller** "" able to know when someone has changed insurance companies, divorced, remarried, deleted insurance, moved, etc.

**Air traffic controller** "" able to smoothly divert patient traffic in an attempt to keep them from running into others and finding out their "time of arrival" is the same as others. Able to handle maximum doses of STRESS!

**Medi-copter pilot** "" able to hover over an emergency, assess and remove the patient in distress and deliver them to the safest place AWAY from the lobby – seeking clinical assistance "" while remaining calm

**Multi-lingual** "" able to understand multiple languages and be able to effectively communicate

**Coach** "" able to motivate the team, support the team, protect the team while being part of the team's proactive plan, not the team's problem

**"One Ringy Dingy"** – Switchboard Operator"" able to pleasantly answer each phone call addressing each one as it is the only call

**Multi-tasker** "" able to effectively & efficiently perform multiple tasks while wearing a smile and a positive attitude "" with each patient

**Juggler** "" able to maintain balance while keeping eyes on the

patient

**Circus trainer** "" able to be the master of MANY ceremonies

**Reservation Concierge** "" scheduling and rescheduling while exhibiting exceptional customer service skills, GLAD that the person has contacted their practice for "reservations" (an appointment)

**Infection Control Officer** "" ensures cleanliness and minimizes germs

**Minimalist** "" able to work without the clutter igloo around them

**Walmart Greeter** "" happy to see everyone that walks through the door

**Helpful characteristics to look for when interviewing a medical front desk applicant:**

Unflappable

Patient

Exhibits kindness

Compassionate

Positive attitude

Exhibit good eye contact

Nice soothing voice

Multi-tasker

Non-complainer

Willingness to help others before themselves

Desire to be cross-trained

Does not have the words, "It's not my job" in their vocabulary

Most healthcare workers that have BEEN a patient or have been with their family member through sickness...make great healthcare employees. They KNOW how it feels to be on "The Other Side Of The Desk"

Denise Price Thomas

*Note: Denise's partner in DPT Consulting & Training is Gladys Friday, pictured here. If you are interested in contacting Denise or Gladys about their services, they can be contacted through their website here or by phone at 704-747-8699 or via email to [denisepricethomas@gmail.com](mailto:denisepricethomas@gmail.com).*

