

Top Tips to Dramatically Improve the Patient Experience!

By Edward Leigh, MA

Create great experiences and you will have super-satisfied patients! Happy patients are more likely to be compliant and are easier to manage. They will also provide high ratings on patient satisfaction surveys and glowing social media comments.

Strong Opening

The first few moments set the tone; what happens in the first minute makes or breaks the experience.

- Always greet the patient by their preferred name. Be cautious with nicknames; just because a patient is named Barbara does not necessarily mean they like being called, “Barb.” Ask EVERY patient this question, “How do you prefer being addressed?”
- Signpost. This word means to tell people what’s coming next (i.e., providing direction). Explaining to patients what will be happening relieves their anxiety. For example, you can say, “Today, we’ll first talk about your concerns, then discuss treatment plans.” Signposting also involves providing time frames (e.g., “This procedure should take about an hour.”). We experience signposting when we call an organization and they say, for example, “Someone will be with you in 10 minutes or less.” Could you imagine being put on hold with no idea how long it would take for someone to speak with you?

Empathy Element

We connect with each other through emotion, not information. We provide information to patients; however, this does not mean we have connected with them on an emotional level. In non-emergency situations, address the psychosocial before the medical issues. Empathize before you educate. Put yourself in their shoes. People are fearful, and they feel a loss of control. Those two factors alone can turn a sweet kind person into a hostile nightmare. Patients want someone to listen to them; the correct use of empathy tells them you are present and that you care. Reflect back on what you feel they are experiencing. This could be as simple as stating, “This must be very stressful for you.” Also, briefly talk with patients about their lives. If you know they enjoy gardening, ask about their garden. Talking about a subject they enjoy relieves their anxiety. Ask EVERY patient this question, “What are your hobbies / interests?” When patients feel emotionally connected with healthcare professionals, their trust is enhanced, and they are more likely to follow medical advice.

Use "I" language not "You" language.

To create warmer conversations, use “I” language and avoid “You” language. For example, if a patient is worried about taking a certain medication, these are two possible responses:

- “I” Language: “I know you have concerns about this medication, however this medication will help you feel better. I want you to feel better.”
- “You” Language: “You have to take this medication.”

As you can see from the above example, the use of “I” language is much friendlier and reduces the risk of the patient becoming defensive.

Edward Leigh, MA, is the Founder & Director of The Center for Healthcare Communication. The Center focuses on dramatically improving patient satisfaction and safety. He just completed the book, *Engaging Your Patients*, which will be available in the fall of 2019. He has appeared on multiple national television programs, including The Today Show and The Oprah Winfrey Network.

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