HOW YOU AND YOUR OFFICE STAFF CAN IMPROVE THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE
The patient–physician relationship is the cornerstone of patient engagement, thus patient satisfaction has become a growing priority for medical practices. When patients visit their physicians’ office, they want a positive experience as well as a good relationship with them.

**WHY IT MATTERS**

- **Patients who have a good experience are more likely to recommend you to their family and friends.**

- **There is a growing trend of physician performance-based compensation tied to improved patient experience, such as the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®) survey.**

- **Good communication between you and your patients can improve clinical outcomes and patient safety, and lower litigation risk.**

Collecting data around the patient experience is the first step toward obtaining actionable insights and driving patient improvement. This can be accomplished by using industry standards such as the Press Ganey Patient Experience Survey or CAHPS Clinical & Group Survey (CG – CAHPS) or creating your own customized surveys. Based on key data insights, you have the ability to create and adjust improvement strategies. For more information, reference the CAHPS Improvement Guide at [facrs.org/~/media/files/advocacy/cahps/improvement%20guide.ashx](https://facrs.org/~/media/files/advocacy/cahps/improvement%20guide.ashx).

Follow these best practices to make your patients feel valued, and a well-taken-care-of member of your team. This will boost patient satisfaction and strengthen your patients’ commitment to follow-up care.
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**1. Improve Ease of Patient Access to Care**

- Keep a few slots open for patients who need same-day appointments. This is called “open-access” scheduling and is intended to reduce the patient “no-show” rate at practices that implement it.
- Other appointments with a physician or a physician extender in your office, such as a nurse practitioner, physician assistant or another in-network physician, if patients are unable to obtain an appointment with their doctor on short notice.
- Maintain an effective triage system at your front desk to ensure that frail and/or very sick patients receive immediate care.
- Extend office hours to accommodate evening and weekend appointments.
- Use a medical answering service — that is live customer service — so patients can leave a message when your office is closed.
- Add patients to a wait list so patients can leave a message when they call and are unable to schedule an appointment when they need it.
- Schedule follow-up appointments before patients leave the office.

**2. Increase Effectiveness of Medical Office Communication**

- Remind patients about their appointment 48 hours in advance.
- Return patients about delays and appointment changes immediately.
- Communicate test results, including follow-up care required, within 24 hours.
- Call patients and schedule needed tests, screenings or annual well visits before they are due.
- Adhere to call-back and responsiveness standards.
- Do not keep patients on hold for time greater that 30 seconds.
- During flu season, it’s important to remind patients to get a flu vaccination.

**3. Enhance Frontline Staff Engagement**

- Great patients with a warm and friendly smile.
- Minimize wait times by analyzing both the process and workflow.
- Ask patients if they need help with their care, such as scheduling an appointment with a specialist.
- At end of the visit, make sure patients can recall in their own words what they were told, and understand follow-up actions.

**4. Improve the Reception Area Experience**

- Keep patients occupied by offering magazines or Internet access.
- Address the “15-minute time to see the doctor” timeframe by notifying patients if the physician is delayed.
- Engage older adult patients (65 years of age or older) by asking them to fill out the attached Patient Health Questionnaire. The document can be used to collaborate with patients, identify triggers and close gaps in care.
- Contact an EmblemHealth Representative or Provider Customer Service for patient education topics such as managing urinary incontinence, falls, and medication adherence.

**5. Make the Post Visit Count**

- Keep patients occupied by offering magazines or Internet access.
- Be timely in reviewing and informing patients about their test results. Mail them to patients within 48 hours of receipt.
- For specialist referral, make sure that the specialist has all the required patient documentation prior to the appointment. Follow up with the specialist regarding his or her recommendation and communicate it to patients.
Improving The Patient-Physician Experience

1. Increase Effectiveness of Patient Communication
   - Spend enough time with patients and be an active listener to best understand their needs.
   - Use clear language that is tailored to the patients’ understanding and needs. Ensure follow-up instructions are clear.
   - Involve patients in decision making to empower them to improve their health outcomes.
   - Practice cultural sensitivity. At EmblemHealth, we recognize that cultural and religious competency is important in the diverse communities we serve. Log on to emblemhealth.com to access the Medical Manual for Religio-Cultural Competency.
   - Offer translation services to ensure that patients understand their needs and treatment.
   - Conclude the visit with “Do you have any questions?”

2. Know Patients’ Medical History
   - Review patients’ medical record before entering the exam room. Patients expect you to know their medical history.
   - Ask patients if they are under a specialist’s care and discuss any treatment they may be receiving.
   - Ask patients if they have been to the Emergency Room or an Urgent Care Center since their last visit with you.

3. Review Patients’ Medications
   - Review patients’ medications during their office visit to ensure they are refilling and taking medications as prescribed. This will also help identify any drug therapy problems.
   - Collaborate with patients regarding treatment expectations, alternative treatment, benefits and risks associated with each medication.
   - When patients have been recently discharged from the hospital, reconcile their medications to ensure medication adherence.
RESOURCES

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
ahrq.gov/cahps/surveys-guidance/cg/improve/index.html

Press Ganey
pressganey.com/resources

These best practices have been compiled from various expert organizations including the Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality (AHRQ), Press Ganey, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), The Mayo Clinic, Medscape Medical News and The Cochrane Review.