

How to Handle Unhappy Patients

The approach taught in this video works with anyone who is angry, upset or unhappy, such as patients, customers and clients.

In this video, we'll use examples with unhappy patients.

The key to making unhappy patients into happy patients is to find solutions that resolve the cause of their unhappiness. You can do this with the following 7 steps.

1. Let the Patient Blow off His or Her Steam

If the patient is angry or highly emotional, listen and understand.

Do not interrupt. Keep your cool. Let them say what they need to say.

Once the anger or emotion is released, and the patient calms down, go to the next step.

If you cannot calm down the patient, continue to step 2 or in extreme cases, skip to step 7.

2. Thank the Patient for the Complaint

If patients cannot complain to you, they complain to others. They post negative reviews. They switch to other practices without telling you why.

So thank them for telling you about the problem.

"Thanks for bringing this billing mistake to our attention."

"I'm glad you told me there was a problem with our receptionist."

"I appreciate you letting me know I was rushing you."

3. Gather the Facts

If you do not have all the facts yet, find out WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHO so you can solve the problem.

"Let me get to the bottom of this billing problem. Do you know the date of the service or the statement?"

"What happened with our receptionist?"

"Can you tell me when I was rushing you?"

You need facts. Listen to any opinions or conclusions, but get the details. You will need them to solve the problem.

4. Apologize

Finger pointing, denial, explaining, shifting the guilt to someone else or blaming the patient, will not resolve the complaint . . . and often makes matters worse.

"It wasn't a billing mistake. We thought you had better insurance."

"Our receptionist was just tired of your attitude."

"I only have five minutes to give to each patient."

So after you thank the patient for the complaint, apologize. Even if the complaint is not true, or you had nothing to do with the cause of the complaint, apologize.

"I'm sorry we accidentally billed you for that service."

"I'd like to apologize for our receptionist's behavior."

"I'm sorry I rushed you."

In many cases, the patient will now be happy.

"Oh, that's okay. I shouldn't have gotten so upset."

If after your apology the patient is not yet happy, continue with step 5.

5. Find a Solution

"What would resolve this problem for you?"

"What could I do to make you happy?"

"How can we make this right?"

Some patients will be happy just because you asked the question.

"Never mind. You don't need to do anything."

Other patients will propose a simple, small solution. "Can you call my insurance company for me and see if they'll pay for the service?"

If the patient does not offer a solution, or if his or her solution is out of line, propose a solution.

6. Propose a Solution

"What if we waive the \$32 fee for you?"

"While I can't fire our receptionist, can she apologize to you personally?"

"Next time you come in, I'll set aside more time for you."

If the patient agrees and is happy with the solution, good job! Follow through, as needed, to ensure the solution is implemented.

97% of your patients will now be happy. You have successfully resolved their anger, unhappiness or upset with you. Congratulations!

7. The Impossible Patient

If you have done all the previous steps and still cannot make the patient happy, end conversation.

"Let's both take some time to think about this and chat again in the future."

"I'm sorry we can't work this out right now."

"I'll talk to _____ and let you know if we can think of another solution to propose for you."

If you are a staff member, you cannot dismiss the patient. However, you can and should write up all the details and give your recommendations to the practice owner.

If you are the practice owner, you should dismiss the impossible patient. Read "How to Dismiss Patients" in your Management Tools binder for the steps to take while protecting your practice.

How to Implement

- A. Print the transcript of this video.
- B. Practice the 7 steps in this video. See the "Practice Makes Perfect" tutorial on how to practice.
- C. Keep the printed transcript where you can grab it when the need arises.
- D. Use the steps to ensure 97% of your patients are happy with you and your practice.
- E. Take action to dismiss the impossible 3%.
- F. Enjoy a happier, more successful practice and career!

Unhappy Patients Checklist

- 1. Let the Patient Blow off His or Her Steam.
- 2. Thank the Patient for the Complaint
- 3. Gather the Facts
- 4. Apologize
- 5. Find a Solution
- 6. Propose a Solution
- 7. Recognize the Impossible Patient