

## Principles for Dealing with Patients as Customers

- Keep a professional appearance.
  - For many patients, there is a relationship among cleanliness, neatness and health.
- Convey positive non-verbal messages.
  - Greater patient satisfaction occurs not only with more touch but also with more non-verbal attention. This shows patients you want to establish a pleasant relationship or bond with them.
  - Touching is a ritual that establishes your personal relationship with your patients. Reach out and offer a handshake as you greet the patient. It shows you are a caring person.
  - Don't touch an angry person.
  - Use eye contact. Look at patients as you listen or speak.
  - Use an open body posture.
  - Use non-verbal encouragements such as nods and gestures.
- Acknowledge the patient immediately.
  - Greet and comfort first, do paperwork second. Don't let patients wait, even if you are busy. Show that you will assist them shortly and let them know you are aware of their presence.
  - Give your full attention to those patients who are present. If you must answer the phone, do not hesitate to put the patient on the phone on hold while you address the patient in your immediate presence.
  - If you are talking with another staff member, excuse yourself immediately and address the patient. All staff must recognize that the patient comes first.
  - End all personal conversations on the telephone immediately upon the approach of a patient.
- Introduce yourself.
  - You, too, are a person with an identity to which the patient can relate. Give the patient your first name and describe in simple terms what you will be doing.
  - Reinforce the spoken use of your name with a visible nametag, a nameplate on your desk, or a business card.
- Greet the patient by name.
  - Use the patient's name to personalize the service you provide.
  - Open conversations with patients with a friendly greeting. For example, "Good morning, Mr. Smith." (Smile.) "I am Brenda, your receptionist. I need some information for your record. It will not take long." (Smile.)
- Use a natural conversational tone.
  - Speak with a calm, firm, caring and confident tone. Do not raise your voice in anger. Speak clearly and distinctly.

- Pay attention to details.
  - Little things are important and send signals to patients about who you are.
- Give the patient your full attention.
  - Staff members should not interrupt when you are with a patient, except in emergencies.
- Use appropriate language.
  - Use language the patient will understand. Don't talk about irrelevant subjects. Use the time to explain procedures and routine tasks.
- Tell the patient what you can do.
  - Do not begin comments with statements about what you cannot do. Provide choices or alternatives that you and the patient have.
- Inform, instruct and explain.
  - Provide as much information as the patient is interested in knowing, such as basic and elaborate instructions, explanations and directions.
  - People respond better when they are informed about what is going to happen to them. Uncertainty causes fear, worry and confusion.
  - Explain delays and changes truthfully.
  - Explain why you are performing certain tasks. The informed patient is likely to be more cooperative.
- Do something extra.
  - Take the initiative and go out of your way to provide the extra touch.
- Build a partnership with the patient.
  - Partnership-building goes beyond informing and soothing the patient. It is involving the patient in a participatory relationship by enlisting patient input.
- Show appreciation.
  - Show and tell patients how much you value them.
- Be discreet.
  - Respect the patient's privacy.
- Be competent and knowledgeable.
  - This includes performing tasks quickly and accurately.
  - Patients want to know that you are up-to-date and have the latest clinical information.
- Acknowledge errors quickly.
  - Don't try to cover up mistakes with excuses. Admit your error and start solving the problem.
  - Report patient service problems you see or experience to the person who keeps track of these incidents in your organization.

- Look for small opportunities.
  - Going out of your way for a patient requires that you maintain technical, administrative and procedural knowledge. You should know when and how far you can depart from established protocols, guidelines and procedures.
- Make the last impression count.
  - Use a positive manner to wrap up the interaction.
  - Don't end the interaction on a hostile note.
- Make follow-up contact.
  - Following a procedure or treatment, it makes good business and therapeutic sense to check on the patient's condition.
  - Document telephone calls.
- Handle complaints effectively.
  - Take the patient seriously. Apologize for any inconvenience. Tell the patient that you will do everything possible to solve the problem.
  - Maintain your composure, no matter what the patient says to you.
  - Give the patient the opportunity to describe the full complaint without interruption. Avoid the temptation to retaliate against patients who are rude; focus your energy on determining the facts and evaluating the action the patient wants you to take.
  - Help the patient save face if it becomes obvious that he or she is in the wrong.