

Customer Service: The Art of Caring

Live CHAMPS Webcast, 07/22/09, Presented by Lisa Mouscher

Webcast Follow-Up: Responses to Questions Posed During the live Event

1. What should you do when a patient cries because she does not get her way?

If a patient cries, it's important to make sure you really understand why they are crying. Ask questions to determine what's going on and ensure understanding. If you find that in fact they are really crying to get their way, you may want to hand them some tissues, tell them you'll give them a moment, and then continue on with the path you feel is right.

2. What should/can you do if they call you names?

If someone calls you names or swears at you, it is often appropriate to tell the person that you would like to assist them, and that you are treating them with respect and would like the same from them. It may help to say that you understand their frustration, or that what they are going through is difficult, and that when they are ready to stop calling you names (or stop yelling or swearing at you) you'd like to try to assist them.

3. Is it ever appropriate or okay to ask or tell a patient to not come back?

This is a complicated question dictated by law and policy, and this is not my area of expertise. I suggest that you check with your clinic manager for more information.

4. Regarding the statistics of customer service (disgruntled patients tell an average of 11 people about their experience, and it takes 12 positive experiences to overcome 1 negative experience): is this statistic the same for one provider versus general customer service in that persons' life?

This is a general customer service statistic.

5. How do recommend handling an upset patient in person versus on the phone?

Both in person and on the phone, it's important to let the person know that you would like to try to help them. In both cases it's important to take the time to listen, understand the issue, show empathy, and try to be of assistance in a manner that shows you care. Remember—heart, head, heart.

In person, the person may be able to hear or see what you are doing to try to resolve their issue, but it's important not to assume that they know what's going on. Check in with them regularly and let them know what's happening. Your friendly, caring, patient approach will often make the difference between a customer who leaves angry and one who leaves satisfied.

If you have a patient on the phone and you are the right person to try to resolve their issue, it is important that you maintain a friendly, caring, patient approach. If someone is holding on the phone, check back with them regularly, and ask if they would prefer for you to call them back when you have an answer for them. If you agree to call them back, it's important to follow through. If you have an approximate timeframe, let them know that you'll call them by a certain time to at least give them an update. People generally feel much better served if they are kept in the loop.

Both on the phone and in person, if the patient feels that you took the time to listen and cared about their issue and about them as a person, half the battle is often won right there. Resolving the issue to the extent possible, as quickly as possible, is also important in order to create a positive outcome.

The two keys to remember are 1) put yourself in their shoes, and 2) respond first with your heart, then with your head, then with your heart.