

Courteous and Helpful Office Staff

Essential Behaviors to Improve the Patient Experience

Q. Were clerks and receptionists at this provider's office as helpful as you thought they should be?

- **Use the 15/10 rule: make eye contact when the patient is 15 feet away and greet the patient at 10 feet.** Staff should smile, make eye contact, and use welcoming body language.
- **Always thank patients for visiting** the practice prior to their departure.
- **Try to answer questions in an affirmative way.** If a request cannot be accommodated, try to offer an alternative.
- **When providing patients with instructions to obtain additional tests or treatments, take time to walk them through the logistics of completing those tasks.** Make sure the patient knows either when an appointment is or how to schedule it, where the facility is located, what prior steps must be taken, etc. This will take a focused education session for staff members.
- **Multitasking** is often a requirement of this job; however, staff should be trained not to multitask whenever they interact directly with patients. For example, **staff should always look up from the computer when someone approaches the desk/reception area.**

Q. Did clerks and receptionists at this provider's office treat you with courtesy and respect?

- **Greet the patient using the appropriate name and title** (Mr., Ms., Mrs., Miss, etc.). If you are unsure of how to pronounce the patient's name, apologize and inquire, "I'm sorry, I'm not sure how to pronounce your name. Would you help me?" If someone else is accompanying or representing the patient, extend the same greetings to that person.
- **Introduce yourself by name to patients who do not know you.** For example, "Hi, I'm Carmen, and I will be checking you in today."
 - Explain how you will help the patient. For example, "I will be reviewing your insurance information with you," or "I will be taking you back so we can take your vitals," etc.
 - Ensure your ID/photo badge is visible to the patient.
- **Body language impacts the patient's perceptions of courtesy.** Registration is likely the patient's first human interaction at the practice and is, therefore, the first opportunity to offer comfort through friendly and warm staff.
 - Be aware of facial expressions and nonverbal language, which can convey negative emotions or mixed messages.
- **Speak slowly and calmly.** Patients are anxious to see their health care providers and often do not feel well. Juggling a long patient line, telephone calls and care team questions can be challenging. Focus on the patient in front of you. Acknowledge the patient even when you need to stop helping him or her to help someone else.
- **Set a standard that no complaining be voiced within earshot of patients.** Patients are suffering from stress and pain, and no matter how legitimate the complaint may be, it is not the patients' problem.