

Transparency Revealed: How to Make Payments More Transparent to Patients

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Medical practices and price transparency haven't exactly gone hand in hand in the past. With complex reimbursement systems and the real need to focus on other tasks, practices have not always been up front with patients when it comes to revealing the payment due until long after the service is rendered.

Today's patients, however, are clamoring for more information, more education and more transparency. Granted, this can require a shift in procedures and a fresh approach to doing business, yet there are many opportunities to enhance transparency before the patient ever sets foot inside your practice, not to mention a variety of benefits for all parties. From pre-visit financial clearance to appointment calls, from scheduling reminders to initial in-person interactions, transparency around payments can set the right tone well ahead of time for your patients. Your practice also benefits, as a more informed patient offers a higher probability of payment.

Information on pricing is now available to patients online (see, for example, <https://www.healthcarebluebook.com/>), but it is often confusing and can be inaccurate. Take matters into your own hands by integrating these strategies in your practice to enhance transparency when it comes to pricing:

- **Make an immediate effort.** After you receive and welcome the patient, you can follow through with "How would you like to take care of your payment today?" (Make sure it's "how would you like to..." instead of "would you like to...?"). Ensure that you are ready to accept payment in multiple forms and aim to get more than just the co-pay. Always attempt to settle any outstanding balances. You can even take payments over the phone when scheduling or confirming appointments. For scheduled procedures, surgeries and tests, the appointment process should incorporate a pre-service deposit; this reminds patients of their financial responsibility before the appointment and ensures regular payments for a practice.
- **Be thoughtful in the request.** Learning to make effective payment requests can be a great training opportunity for staff, especially those not well versed in this

procedure. Encourage staff to use the patient's name, make eye contact, and provide payment information discreetly if the meeting is in person. Share the benefit summary and any other pertinent information with a smile. Staff should also be trained to calmly handle refusal-to-pay situations with a referral or follow-up.

- **Create efficiencies.** The payment process should be as seamless as possible. If you currently have to leave a station to process a credit card or collect change, determine how you can update this process. The longer that patients wait, the more they will get frustrated or second-guess their decision to make an upfront payment, so the faster, the better, in most cases.
- **Be upfront and honest.** Ultimately, patients want the truth, and they want to understand their financial situation. They will appreciate details being provided ahead of time, so ensure that you have this information readily available for them. Likewise, make sure that all patient-facing staff are knowledgeable when it comes to insurance, which is often changing and evolving.
- **Take advantage of technology.** Many patients appreciate the convenience of making a payment via their phone or online banking. Use technology to make available and accept more online payments. Avoid charging extra fees for such payments.
- **Say “thank you.”** This is such a simple action and such an important one. Patients want to be appreciated and valued. Delivering a sincere “thank you” at the end of the transaction sets the stage for positive future interactions.

When a patient receives a surprising bill a month or six weeks following an appointment, it can create panic, frustration, and/or confusion, particularly if the individual is not presently prepared to pay the bill in full. This can lead to non-payment and no-shows in the future, creating a vicious cycle that benefits no one.

On the other hand, greater transparency in pricing can build both trust and loyalty, while also bolstering communication, and ensuring more positive relationships and payments for years to come. When you focus on being more transparent in pricing and payment requests, your patients may be thanking you.



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