

We Are All Patients



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I had the bad fortune to suffer an injury recently, but it gave me the opportunity to evaluate navigating the healthcare system as a patient. While these observations aren't meant to be a reflection on *your* practice, they are provided to offer a lens into our collective continual opportunity for improvement.

No easy button. Getting an appointment remains a friction-filled process. Locating the phone number, getting a scheduler on the line, and seemingly having to convince them to book an appointment feels wildly wrong. I walked out of several care settings, thinking, "Geez. I am paying for this service..." Self-scheduling was available, but only on a limited basis -- and seemed nearly as clunky as calling the practice. Focus on your scheduling process -- in essence, it is your practice's sales department, so make it easy for the patient.

Enough with the forms. We have long obsessed with our forms, and I was hoping that we had loosened the grip. However, I was handed forms in all colors (true story - pink, yellow, **and** green), but most annoying were the questions on repeat. Asking the patient via two forms, then by the medical assistant, and finally the physician - it left me wondering if

anyone was communicating with one another? If you ask the patient once, don't request it again unless you have to by law.

Cost of care. Revenue cycle management is a vital function of your practice, yet engagement with the patient may not match your after-visit efforts. In my case, I was given several important options during my care. Perhaps I needed additional imaging? Another referral might be required? Maybe a good brace [for the injury] would help me? Etc. When I probed gently about the cost - an important decision-making factor in all other aspects of my life – I was greeted with a puzzled look. I recognize that the reimbursement system is very complex, but it's crucial to honor the patient for this consideration even if just to acknowledge cost as a determinant.

Thin walls. At one front office, I arrived five minutes late for my appointment. The appointment was for 11:45 am, and I was checking in at 11:50. Because I had been a dutiful patient in completing my registration on a pre-visit basis, my time to check-in was a matter of seconds. As I was sitting down, the phone rang at the front desk. I could hear the receptionist saying: "Well, y'all are the ones who scheduled her so close to lunch. I can't help it that she's here. Someone's got to come get her..." [and so forth]. Whether your team is frustrated with each other, the system – or whatever it may be, it's not appropriate to take it out on the patient. The walls are thin – recognize that patients are *always* listening.

The lesson? Look around. Be observant. Put yourself in the patient's shoes, and remember, we are all patients ourselves at one time or another.

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