

Spring Hills Clinic

At the last staff meeting at Spring Hills Clinic, there was discussion about how everyone could make the patient experience better. The issue came up since some of the patients had been complaining about the fact that they felt more like a number than a person. Apparently the typical cold and flu season coupled with a very successful growth strategy has paid off, the number of daily patient visits had increased by three to five per doctor. One of the large oil companies just opened a plant in the community and the outreach program developed by the doctors has worked.

Spring Hills is a seven doctor primary care clinic which means there are almost 30 additional visits a day. The senior doctors, Gonzalez and Martinez, were the original doctors. They slowly added the others to the group and the age ranges from 67 to 32. They know that the younger doctors are also an issue since they want more time off. In fact Dr. Steven Lee has gone one step further and allows the staff to call him Steve in front of patients. This does not sit well with Drs. G and M! The doctors have similar practice styles, are willing to use the same basic treatment plans, and the managed care payers indicate that things are fine with patient satisfaction. The reason the staff meeting was called was to focus on the issue of the patient experience is that Dr. Martinez is on the board of the big Medicare Advantage plan and has heard that other practices are failing in their patient satisfaction ratings and he does not want that to happen in Spring Hills.

He asked what the internal patient satisfaction surveys are revealing and was not happy with the initial report.

It seems the patients have been rushed through the entire patient visit cycle from the front desk to the clinic area to check out. Complaints have been that they don't feel welcome and they are rushed through each step in the process. Most of the complaints are coming from the established patients who have been with the clinic for several years. Several have complained that there are new faces at the front desk, new medical assistants, and that the "family feeling" that they expect is no longer there.

At the same time, the staff has approached you about three patients who are causing many issues with patients in the reception area. They all have attitude problems, constantly complaining about the wait time. One always wants to change the channel on the TV which is never the one that she wants. One likes the idea that there is coffee available in fact he comes back at times when he doesn't have an appointment. At those times, he is pleasant but when he has an appointment he is a different person. The third one always takes too much time with the doctor during the visit. She never tells the medical assistant why she really is there and brings up the real issue as the doctor is leaving the room.

The staff has had enough with these patients and so many others. It seems the practice has been too nice and it is now time to "train" the patients about the fact that they have some responsibilities as well.

The staff acknowledged that things are more hectic. There has been additional staff added to the team so the thought of adding others is not an acceptable alternative. The team started to brainstorm and during their session they considered the following:

- What could be done in the waiting area?
- What needs to be done to help the receptionist?
- Can the medical assistants do things differently?
- Can the doctors help?

All of these questions were posed. Dr. Martinez specific orders are to re-establish the “family” atmosphere for the patients, making things more efficient is not the first priority. Patients, their families and feelings come first. We must meet the patient’s expectations

What would you define as the

- First area to focus
- Easiest solution, and
- Most important issue