

SATISFACTION



Leveraging Patient Satisfaction Surveys

It's critical to know how your practice is perceived.

BY MARK TERRY

There are a number of ways that a podiatric physician can utilize a patient satisfaction survey. Depending on your specific situation, your Medicare payments and reimbursement rates may be affected by them. This is via the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) scoring system and is associated with physicians within hospital systems.

There are two primary reasons to conduct patient surveys: to find out what your practice needs to improve on and to help solicit reviews.

There isn't much that can be done about predetermined HCAHPS survey questions if you're in that situation. However, if you are running your own practice, you do have control over patient surveys unless you're in a state where it is not legal.

Success Stories/Reviews

Why reviews? One reason is to monitor what people are saying about your practice. Some physicians think that if they don't encourage patients to write reviews, no one will. To some

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extent that's true, although some people will review you regardless of your promotion of it; and, unfortunately, the reality is that people most likely to write a review unencouraged are angry and will leave a negative review.

As Rem Jackson, Founder and CEO of Top Practices, notes on his website, "Patients will review you whether you

any negative reviews under a deluge of satisfied patient comments. And since search engines, especially Google, are how new patients find physicians (that and word of mouth), search engine algorithms respond to reviews and number of reviews and links to your site. Good reviews are a

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part of good SEO (Search Engine Optimization).

Peter Wishnie, DPM, of Family Foot & Ankle Specialists (Piscataway, NJ), says that if a patient is doing well in treatment, they ask them to write a success story. It's basically three questions, such as, "What were your feelings before coming to the podiatrist? Were you apprehensive about seeing us and how do you feel right now? Is there anything you can do now that you couldn't do before?"

"And then we ask for permission to print it, on our website and on social media, and use it that way," Wishnie says. "That's for success stories."

That's a very proactive way to get reviews, and, according to Cindy

Pezza, President and CEO of Pinnacle Practice Achievement, that's necessary. She points out that there are numerous platforms where patients can review their podiatrists, includ-

a platform that sends a direct link to the patient via email or text message, so they can click right through. "So, they don't have to figure out the process of how to leave a review." That

The solution, Pezza says, is to have a platform that sends a direct link to the patient via email or text message, so they can click right through.

ing Facebook, Yelp, Vitals, Healthgrades and others. "The problem is just asking patients. 'Hey, you know, you were really happy when you left, do you mind leaving us a review?' That's great, but they're not going to do it."

The solution, Pezza says, is to have

can be through a service like SurveyMonkey; many other website companies can handle it as well.

Patient Surveys

Patient satisfaction surveys seem to be associated with people want-

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Example #1

Key:

- 1 = Poor
- 2 = Fair
- 3 = Good
- 4 = Excellent
- NA = Not Applicable

The overall care you received at Fancy Foot & Ankle Associates.

1 2 3 4 NA

Courtesy and professionalism shown by:

Receptionist
1 2 3 4 NA

Medical Assistants
1 2 3 4 NA

Physician
1 2 3 4 NA

Office Manager
1 2 3 4 NA

Amount of wait time spent:
1 2 3 4 NA

Example #2

Another type of format is similar, with answers being:

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Poor
- Does Not Apply

Example questions for this format include:

1) Evaluate the following statements regarding YOUR APPOINTMENT:

- Ease of making appointments by phone.
- Appointment available within reasonable amount of time.
- Efficiency of the check-in process.
- Waiting time in the reception area.
- Waiting time in the exam room.
- Keeping you informed if appointment time was delayed.

2) Evaluate the following statements regarding OUR FACILITY:

- Hours of operation convenient for you.
- Overall comfort of the office.
- Adequate parking.
- Signage and directions easy to follow.

Other areas to address revolve around communication, such as: "Treatment was clearly explained to me" and "I had an opportunity to have my questions answered."

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ing their healthcare experience to resemble their online retail experiences. A 2020 Guidehouse and Centric Digital survey of more than 1,400 hospitals and health systems found that 60% of consumers expect their healthcare digital experience to mirror that of their retail digital experience. Also, 81% of consumers read reviews about a provider, even after they've been referred.

Pezza points out, "There's word-of-mouth components to marketing that will always be there. But for most people, even when you're shopping on Amazon, you click on Amazon's Choice and then you look at the reviews. And generally, people go with the one where there are the most positive reviews."

There are many different formats that can be used for the reviews, but two examples appear on page 80.

7 Ways to Improve Survey Responses

If you do choose to conduct patient surveys, here are seven tips that can give you better responses.

1) Quick turnaround. Don't wait to send out the survey. Send it out within 24 to 48 hours after a patient visit.

2) Quick and simple. Ensure the survey is quick and simple. Not many people want to spend a lot of time on a patient survey. Yours should be short and easy to complete. Preferably, it should take less than five minutes to respond to the survey.

3) Easy to analyze. Utilize multiple choice questions with yes or no answers. Include a box at the bottom for additional comments, but in general avoid open-ended questions.

4) Focus. Most often, patients focus on specific problem areas. The most common categories are their experience with office staff, issues with scheduling, problems communicating with the office, and whether they feel they were treated in a respectful, humane way. A big trigger area is wait-times, of course.

5) Digital. Use email, your website, or a text to send out your sur-

vey. Digital surveys are easy to automate. In addition, studies indicate patients prefer online surveys up to 30 times more than paper surveys.

6) Use it. There is no point to issuing surveys and ignoring the data. Of course, maybe your reviews will be so stunningly positive that there's no room for improvement (ahem). Analyze the results and identify specific areas to improve. Break down those areas and determine potential responses, breaking them into small changes and big changes. A small

can improve trust and rapport.

- Educate patients on what you're doing and why you're doing it. Provide written materials they can take home.

- Take an unbiased look at your facility. Is it looking worn? Is it clean and well-maintained? Try to get into the mindset of a new patient. You see your practice every day and might not think too much about how it looks. Does it need new carpet or fresh paint? How's the lighting?

If you do make changes, it might be worthwhile to modify your survey to determine if the responses are better after you made the changes.

change might be that your office is too warm or too cold. A big change might require your staff to be trained to improve patient interactions. Share the results with your staff. This will help get buy-in as well as feedback on ways to improve. You may need to adopt new workflows or technology.

7) Follow up and engage. If you do make changes, it might be worthwhile to modify your survey to determine if the responses are better after you made the changes. Consider a follow-up survey that specifically focuses on the changes you made.

The results of a patient satisfaction survey don't necessarily directly tie to the care you give. There are numerous factors that can influence a survey result, such as room temperature, facility cleanliness, or wait-times that were beyond your control.

Tips for Improving Patient Satisfaction

Patient satisfaction surveys are a little bit like report cards. There are, of course, other things a podiatric physician and staff can do to improve patient satisfaction. These include:

- Establish personal connections and nurture them. This is back to the basics: make eye contact, use patients' names, ask about their day.

- Engage with patients before beginning clinical procedures. This

- Upgrade older systems, such as your patient portal or scheduling software.

- If there are going to be delays, let the patient know at check-in and be as specific as possible. Apologize for the delays. Letting the patient know ahead of time that there is a delay allows them to make an informed decision on whether to reschedule or wait.

- Provide printed materials and/or post an FAQ page on your website that's up-to-date and describes how to refill prescriptions, schedule appointments, or get care after hours.

Should You Respond to Negative Reviews?

In general, the answer to that question is no. As Pezza points out, "You have to just bury them with good reviews. But if you know who the patient is that's disgruntled, it's very tempting. But that person is a customer, and the customers are always right, so you need to take your emotions out of it. And potentially, you could reach out and apologize. You're apologizing because the patient feels that way. There's a lot to be said about saying you're sorry."

And, of course, the point of doing the patient survey is to legit-

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imately determine if there are areas where you can improve. You need to understand for negative reviews that perhaps the patient was having a bad day or what they were responding to was something not

necessarily related to your practice. Wishnie points out that a lot of their negative reviews are associated with non-prescription products they offer in-house, which are there for patient convenience, but may be more expensive than can be found at local stores or online retail outlets.

A few other best practices if you do decide to respond to a negative review:

- 1) Understand how HIPAA applies and your confidentiality obligations. That means not acknowledging the reviewer was a patient, not identifying the patient by name, or discussing individual patient experiences.
- 2) Don't respond publicly.
- 3) Don't respond impulsively, defensively, or emotionally.
- 4) If you do respond publicly (See #2), only include simple statements about your practices and procedures.
- 5) Consider, if appropriate, contacting the patient by way of a private phone call.

If you do respond publicly to a negative review, only include simple statements about your practice and procedures.

Worth It?

Wishnie says patient reviews are “absolutely” worth it. “Even if a doctor refers a patient to another podiatrist, they’re also going to be looking at the reviews. The patient might see that you have better reviews or a lot more of them and they’ll think, ‘Well, I want to go there, not to that one.’ It’s amazing the number of times we ask patients how they heard about us, and they say they saw all the great reviews online. It can make a huge difference.” **PM**



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