



# How to Succeed in a Niche Market

Help your patients clearly understand your treatment plan.

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**W**hether discussing sports medicine, biomechanics, surgery, or general foot care, have you ever wondered why we call it “practicing” medicine? It’s because none of us ever get it 100% correct. That’s right! It’s an imperfect art and science.

To get it as close to 100% right as possible, you must transform from a doctor to a “caregiver”. Caregivers get it *almost* right. What’s the difference between a doctor and a caregiver? As the term describes, caregivers demonstrate that they care. Caregivers have the fundamental capability of encouraging their patients to do what’s best for them. In a single word, they get them to “comply”. This is especially challenging when we ask the patient to assume the financial responsibility of their care due to the lack of coverage or when facing high copay costs.

Compliance means “act according to someone’s rules, commands, or wishes”. Caregivers are successful as they help their patients make the right choice

at the right time and for the right reason. Patient acceptance and compliance are crucial for a successful niche like sports medicine or biomechanics.

Years of accumulated knowledge stored inside your head is worthless

of their records, and go elsewhere for their medical care.

As physicians, we often need more support when dealing with non-adherent patients. Non-adherence is estimated to cost our nation’s

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unless you can persuade patients to do what’s in their best interest. The art of persuasion is a critical component of the art of medicine, yet too many doctors fail at it. It is not uncommon for a busy doctor to make a recommendation. But if the patient disagrees, the doctor will often assume a take-it-or-leave-it attitude, potentially eroding the doctor-patient bridge and possibly rupturing the relationship and the rapport between the two. As a result, patients will leave the practice, request a copy

healthcare system over 100 billion dollars annually! Yet the blame for some, and possibly most non-adherences, can be placed squarely on the shoulders of doctors.

Be careful not to confuse persuasion with “manipulation”. The two are polar opposites. Only persuasion involves getting someone to do what’s best for THEM, while manipulation often involves self-serving purposes and is in the doctor’s best interest.

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## Niche Market (from page 45)

Listen to your patients carefully. You should not only hear their words but also try to hear the emotions their words carry. Capturing these emotions is the essence of “empathy”. Being able to reflect the patient’s emotions back to them in the form of paraphrases is the first building block of a powerful bridge of credibility and trustworthiness needed for persuasion.

As educated humans, we have a strong desire to impart information. Speaking (imparting information) is easy. Listening is not. It is a well-known observation that the average doctor interrupts a patient after 16 seconds when asking them what concerns they might have. Is it any wonder that bridges of trust and bonding are thwarted when our listening skills are so deficient?

When patients are educated about services such as orthotics, sent for blood tests and imaging studies, or referred to other clinicians for consultations, treat-

to improve interpersonal communication with patients and improve your niche market acceptance rate:

**1) Slow down.**  
Communication can be improved

**6) Provide written instructions and literature on the condition and the proposed treatment.**

**7) Adequately train and educate the staff to communicate with the**

## Explain things to patients like you would explain them to your grandmother.

by speaking slowly and by using empathic paraphrases. This will help foster a patient-centered approach to the clinician-patient interaction.

**2) Use plain, nonmedical, yet decisive language.**

Explain things to patients like you would explain them to your grandmother. Be sure to avoid ambivalence. Use “power phrases” such as “it’s important,” “it’s critical,” etc. For example, *“It’s essential that we control the mechanical weakness-*

**patient to help prevent inter-office communication breakdowns.**

**8) With critical orders, designate a staff member to call the patient to confirm their adherence to the plan.**

Patients have a lot on their minds while visiting a medical office. Having a structured system in place to effectively communicate with patients and adequate staff training will help improve your patient’s understanding of their role and participation in their healthcare treatment plan. **PM**

## When patients are educated about services such as orthotics, sent for blood tests and imaging studies, or referred to other clinicians for consultations, treatments, or procedures, these are often brief discussions.

ments, or procedures, these are often brief discussions. Occasionally, they are handed a piece of paper and simply told to “make an appointment”. Realize how our behaviors and lack of attention to these details can trigger non-compliance or, even worse, a malpractice claim.

### Clinician-patient communication problems involved in malpractice lawsuits:

- Inadequate explanation of diagnoses
- Inadequate explanation of treatment or its importance
- Patient feels ignored
- Clinician fails to understand the perspective of patient or relatives
- Clinician discounts or devalues views of patients or relatives
- Patient feels rushed

The following eight steps will help

*es of your feet by using functional foot orthotics”. Of course, it’s then important to define an orthotic understandably. “Orthotics placed inside of our shoes and sneakers work to control the weaknesses in our feet much like eyeglasses work to control weaknesses in our eyes”.*

**3) Show or draw pictures.**

Visual images can improve the patient’s recall of ideas.

**4) Limit the amount of information provided—and repeat it.**

Information is best remembered when given in small pieces pertinent to the tasks at hand. Repetition further enhances recall.

**5) Use the “teach-back” technique.**

Confirm that patients understand by asking them to repeat back your instructions.

### References

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<sup>2</sup> Factors that prompted families to file medical malpractice claims following perinatal injuries. *JAMA*. 1992; 267:1359-1363; (c)Hickson GB, Clayton EW, Entman SS, et al. Obstetricians’ prior malpractice experience and patients’ satisfaction with care. *JAMA*. 1994; 272: 1583-1587.



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