



From Frustration to Satisfaction—Part 1

Here's how to enhance phone skills in your medical office.

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Effective phone communication is essential for maintaining the performance and reputation of a medical practice. By fostering better phone etiquette and empathy, practices can enhance patient satisfaction and ensure smoother operations.

As you begin to integrate your new scripts and listen to overall performances, be aware of several bad habits that you should ensure your staff members are avoiding. These habits are not easy to fix, because often they are deep-rooted within the person; however, with a conscious effort on everyone's part to change behavioral patterns, they can be eliminated from your practice.

Here are the most common bad habits team members should eliminate to properly answer the phones:

- *Speaking too fast;*
- *Cutting patients off while they are speaking;*
- *Showing a lack of emotion on calls;*
- *Allowing personal emotions to affect the call; and*
- *Pushing problems off to someone else to handle.*

Left uncorrected, these habits can severely affect the overall performance

of your practice. As the leader of your organization, it is important that you let your team members know these behaviors are unacceptable.

Speaking Too Fast

If someone in your practice speaks too fast with callers, patients may need to call back several times to get the information they need. They may write down the wrong appointment times. Or even worse, patients may be so frustrated that they entertain the thought of visiting an-

other practice in your town. All these consequences have a negative impact on your time and the finances of your practice.

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comparison with someone who speaks at a normal pace. This will highlight the problem in the right way and motivate the staff member to correct the bad habit. Know, however, that an individual who speaks too fast will need to be reminded often, since it's a tough habit to break.

A great way to remind staff members to SLOW DOWN is to put those two words on a piece of paper near their phones, so they immediately see it when they take their calls. While it may seem like overkill, I assure you

that the consequences of speaking too fast far outweigh the embarrassment staff members may feel about having those words near their phone. Let them know how important an issue it really is and they will buy into the changes they need to make to better handle your patients.

Cutting Patients Off While They Are Speaking

Another common mistake made by front desk staff members is cutting off patients while they are speaking. While it may not seem that monumental if staff members have to cut off callers every now and again, I beg to differ. In fact, in my mind, cutting someone off while he or she is speaking is one of

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the most disrespectful things you can do during a conversation.

This may happen when front desk staff members are so busy with the things going on in your offices that they are too distracted to focus on the caller. If so, staff members need to be freed up to focus on call-

the art of listening one of the greatest skills your staff possesses.

Showing a Lack of Emotion on Calls

Your front desk staff deals with hundreds of patients every month, and many of them call because they have a problem they want fixed. Because your staff receives so many

being desensitized to patients and must realize that showing some emotion regarding the pain that callers are describing is important.

My recommendation that staff members show emotion should not be mistaken for a suggestion that your team members go over the top with their reactions to what the caller is saying. In other words, your staff doesn't need to weep on the phone in order to connect with callers. It does mean they need to show compassion for their pain and happiness when the patients share that they are feeling better.

Your patients will love your practice if they feel that emotional connection with your team. Showing the right amount of emotion means that staff members are actively engaged in their conversations and in the needs of your patients. It also demonstrates that your practice genuinely cares about what your patients are going through and has a vested interest in their well-being. Otherwise, their visits to your office will be more busi-

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ers so they can perform better on their calls.

Maybe the staff member feels that what he or she is saying is more important than what the caller is saying. If this is the case, this attitude must be dealt with immediately. Any individual who prioritizes himself or herself over the person who is taking the time to call your practice needs to understand that doing so shows a lack of respect to the patient, which is something you never want to happen.

Answering phones in a doctor's office requires compassion and politeness at all times. Your callers are unwell and need your help. A team member may not be in the mood to patiently listen to someone, but it is his or her job to do so, and it's the manager's job to correct the staff member if this is happening. Staff members may not even be aware they have this bad habit. Therefore, it's something that must be paid close attention to.

Your patients expect to be heard, and they measure their relationship with your practice by the courtesy they receive during each interaction with your practice. That is why each member of the team needs to understand that nothing is more important than listening to your patients when they take the time to call your practice. Each phone call is another opportunity to further the relationship with your patients. It all starts by understanding the callers' needs, and their primary need on that particular call is to be heard so they can be helped with their problem. Make

of these calls, they can become desensitized to your patients' needs. When this happens, your staff can neglect to show emotion when speaking with your patients on the phone. This can cause your patients to feel as though you really don't care about their needs.

A great way to make the point to your team about the importance of

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emotion is to have them visualize one of their family members calling your practice to complain about being in terrible pain. Then have them imagine the person who answers the phone providing a robotic response. Ask your staff members how that would make them feel. That is exactly how your patients feel if they call your practice and don't get the courtesy of an emotional response.

Some of your staff members will argue that it is more professional to avoid showing emotion with patients, but I strongly disagree. Human beings have an inherent need to interact with other human beings, no matter what the situation. The call to their doctor's office is one of the most important interactions they have, because they are making that call when they may be the most vulnerable. Therefore, your staff must show emotion, because that is the connection your callers are longing for. That's why your staff must avoid

ness-like, and you don't want your patients to view their relationship with your practice in that way. Instead, you want them emotionally invested in your practice, because when they are, retention rates will skyrocket and so will the overall success of your practice. **PM**

Note: Part 2 of this article will run in the August 2026 issue of Podiatry Management and will include more guidelines around dealing with emotional issues that can affect professionalism and effective problem-solving techniques.



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