



Dealing with Difficult Patients IRL and Online

PART V OF OUR SPRING (TURNED TO SUMMER)
STAFF TRAINING WEBINAR SERIES

JULY 17TH, 2023



The heat of summer is upon us

Some patients present to the office “all fired up”

No matter the location or how busy your clinic days, every practice experiences patients like this.

Let’s discuss ways of keeping the “fire” contained and the residual smoke from causing damage to our fellow team members and other patients.

If a patient is difficult or argumentative it's usually because they:



Owe money



Have/had to wait longer than expected



Are experiencing personal/unrelated issues



Here are some tips for handling those patients . . .

Tip 1. Remain calm

By staying calm, you are more likely to make your difficult patient see things your way.

By doing so you will be able to influence your patient into a calmer state.

Take a deep breath, keep your voice slow and steady and regain control of the conversation.

Tip 2. Understanding perspective

- When a patient verbally attacks a staff member, it is usually because of something that is going on outside the office.
 - A family member is sick
 - A spouse has lost their job
 - They are under increased financial stress
 - They are simply in pain.



Tip 3. Apologize

Simply saying "I'm sorry" shows empathy.

Apologizing does not always mean that you made a mistake or did something wrong. You are "sorry" that the patient is upset or angry.

Example:

Patient: "I've been waiting for almost an hour to see the doctor. When will I be taken back?"

Staff: "I'm sorry Mrs. Greenberg, your appointment is at 3:15. When you arrived at 2:00 we let you know there were other patients scheduled ahead of you. It's almost 3:00 now so you should be taken back very shortly."

Tip 4: "I understand"

People like to feel heard.

Repeating the words "I understand" is often very effective (but takes practice to not sound condescending;)

Example:

Patient: "I don't get why you people charge so much and then I get stuck with the bill."

Staff: "I understand, however, it's actually the insurance companies who determine allowed amounts for services. Unfortunately, you have a deductible that has not been met and the allowed amount for your last visit was applied to your deductible."



Tip 5. Let them know where you're coming from.

- Whenever possible blame the “lousy insurance companies” (high copays, deductibles, co-insurance, etc.) and relate to your patients.

“I know how you feel, my own deductible went up this year and I have a \$75 copay to see a specialist.”

- It is you (the practice) and the patient against “them”!



Tip 6. Build and maintain a positive rapport

01

Build strong relationships with your patients and let them know you care.

02

Take notes in their "chart" about important events, animal names, upcoming surgeries, (what is important to them) etc.

03

When an issue does arise (large balance, bounced check, etc.), it will be far easier to resolve if you have a positive rapport.

Tip 7. Give respect

- No one likes to be treated as if they are unintelligent, incapable or incompetent.
- Explain things in a way that patients will understand.
- Don't talk down to them or assume they understand the medical or billing "lingo" (EOBs, DME deductibles, etc.)
- Practice what your mother taught you and "Do unto others. . ."



Tip 8. Focus on what can be done now.

- Once a problem has arisen, acknowledge it and then focus on what can be done to resolve the situation.
- There's no use crying over spilled milk and there is no shame in admitting when you have made a mistake
- Turn the negative into a positive by showing your patients that you go the extra mile.



Tip 9: Have scripts and plans in place for common issues and questions.
If you don't, use the resources available in PEP library to customize



For collecting copays at the time of service



For collecting/explaining balances



For patients who present without proper documentation, referrals, copays, etc.



For when the doctor is running behind



For when the patient is late or very early



For patients who are "time vampires" (rules of when not to schedule these patients are also helpful)

Tip 10: Black and white doesn't lie

Patients like to reference papers (treatment plans, stretching instructions, explanations of conditions, educational hand outs, etc.)

They may not like them, but they appreciate statements that show clear explanations of balances (deductibles, coinsurance, non-covered services)

Have a designated area in the office where you can take a patient to and discuss their financial responsibility (without an audience)

Tip 11. Ignore them and smile!

- If you have exhausted tips 1-10, Kill them with kindness!
- Minimize your interaction, SMILE and seek the help of a fellow team member or manager.
- It's hard not to smile back when someone smiles at you.



Tip 12. Go above your head when necessary

If you are unable to get through to a difficult patient and the situation has become out of control, it's time to involve a manager or doctor.

No staff member should be abused by a patient, so let management know immediately when you need help (especially if a patient is being inappropriate or abusive in any way).



Let's now switch our focus to dealing with difficult patients on the web

THIS INCLUDES HANDLING NEGATIVE REVIEWS/FEEDBACK AND MANAGING YOUR PRACTICE'S ONLINE REPUTATION.

IN TODAY'S WORLD OF HEALTHCARE THIS IS KEY!

Question: How Do You Build a Positive Practice Reputation?

Create a one of a kind "Patient Experience"

Provide a high quality of care (preparation, protocols, technology, etc.)

Be transparent (financial; no surprises, wait time expectations, etc.)



Once it is built

ARE YOU ACTIVELY
MONITORING AND
MANAGING THAT
REPUTATION?



Online Reviews

WHY THEY ARE A KEY ELEMENT IN PRACTICE
SUCCESS

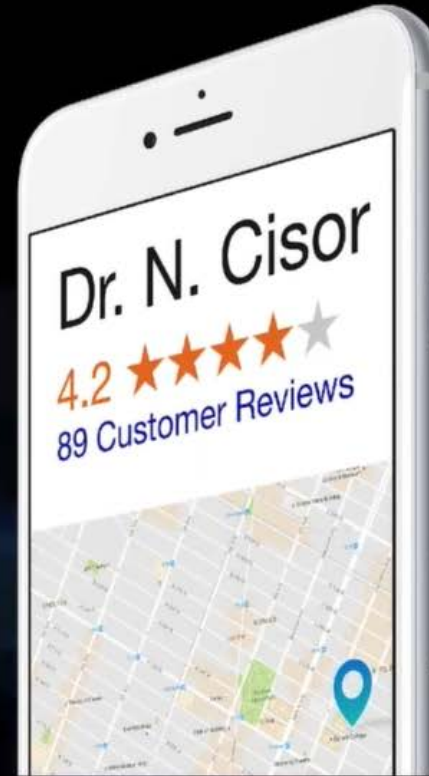


Over 95% of consumers/customers report reading an online review and nearly 90% of those say they won't consider a business with low ratings

Patients are customers. . .

Think about your own online "shopping" experience; Amazon, a new restaurant and especially when searching for a medical provider

Where would you get a root canal?



How do Reviews Impact Your Practice

Inform
consumer/patient
decisions

Help us to make
business/practice
decisions

Increase traffic
and conversions
(tire kicker to
customer/patient)

30% of consumers say
review response is
important when judging a
local business

Importance of Review Response



Shows others you listen to feedback, even when it's negative



Could convert the negative experience into a positive one



Many reviewers delete or update their review if they feel they were heard



What's worse than
negative ratings???

No or very few ratings



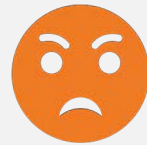
The best way to improve online ratings/reviews is to improve the patient experience IRL (the office)

Ask your patients for feedback/suggestions and think Disney World!

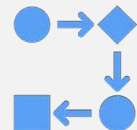
Reviews provide unfiltered feedback



Reviews may spotlight a change that never occurred to you



When you receive a bad review, don't be upset/take it personally*



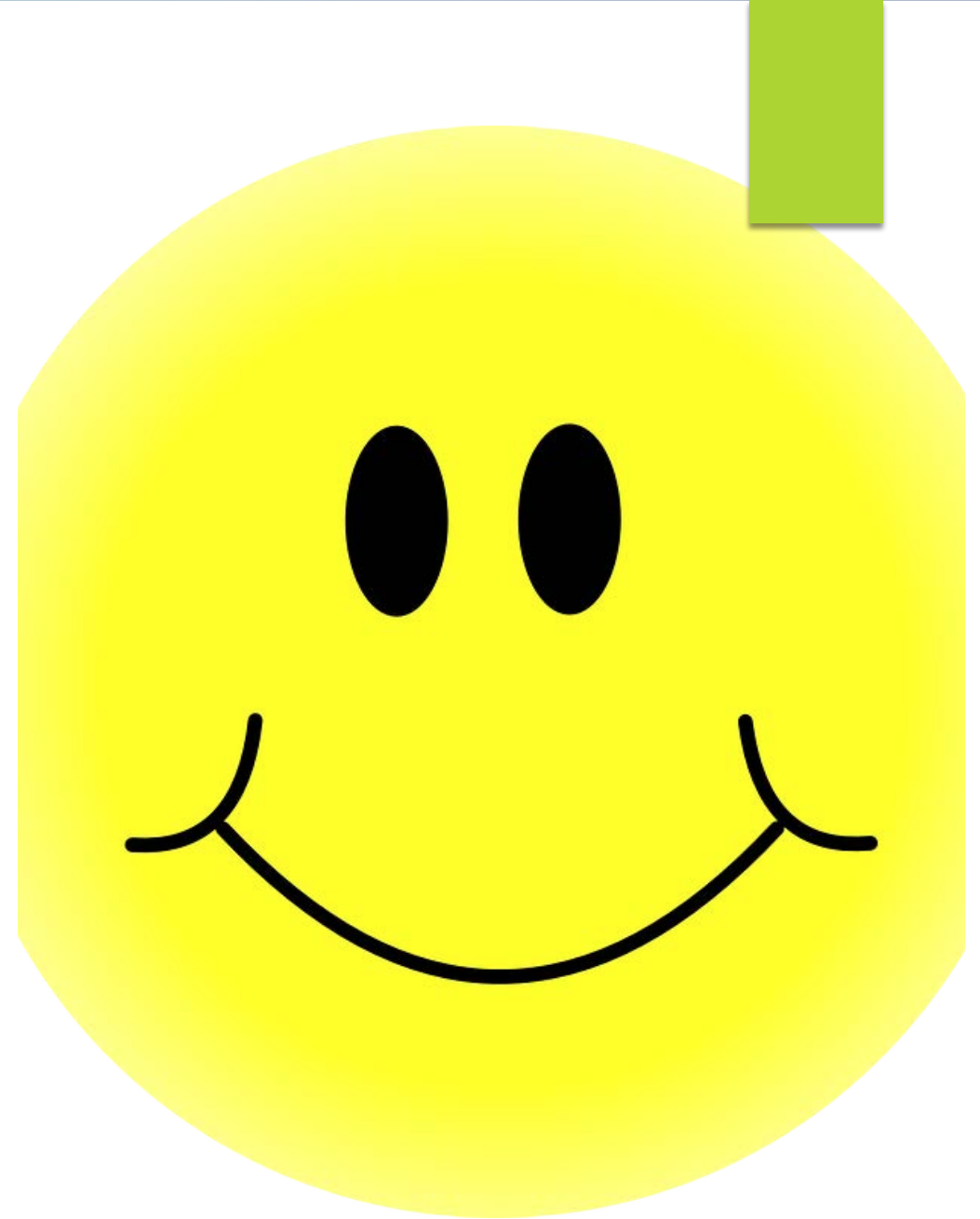
Use it to change/improve your practice
This may mean confronting a staff member about their "attitude" or re-training your entire team.

What to do when you receive a bad review?

- ▶ Find out the true reason for the review
 - ▶ Most negative reviews are due to financial reasons, wait times or a negative encounter with a staff member or doctor.
 - ▶ Respond to the patient (if you know who it is; you can usually figure it out) and try your best to resolve the issue or find out more about how you can avoid it in the future.
 - ▶ Do NOT start an online battle of back and forth (especially with an unreasonable patient)!

Create a “Warm and Fuzzy” Feeling

- ▶ TEAM members are a direct representation of the doctor and practice.
- ▶ All staff who interact with patients (answering phones/scheduling appointments, greeting patients upon arrival, rooming and evaluating, checking patients out and collecting money) should be welcoming (always wearing a smile), make patients feel at ease, and recognize that quality customer service is an essential part of creating a positive patient experience and a stellar practice reputation.



Basic
training and
re-training is
a must!

Make	Make eye contact
Prioritize	The patient standing in front of you is more important than the one on the phone
Wait	Wait for a response to "Would you mind being placed on a brief hold?" before doing so. . .
Smile	Smile through the phone
Listen	Listen without interrupting
Explain	Explain using layman's terms
Pay Attention	Paying close attention to body language and tone

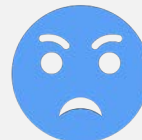
Overall,
Good
outweighs
bad



All in all, it is a very small percentage of our patient population that are "bad seeds."



Treat every patient with kindness and respect and view the difficult/colorful ones as challenges.



You may be surprised at the satisfaction you get from turning that frown upside down!

Thank you for joining me!

- ▶ This recording will be available in the PPA library soon and stay tuned for an email announcing our next scheduled webinar.
- ▶ If you would like a team member added to our email list, contact admin@pinnaclepa.com and let us know.

