

5 Tips to get the Medical Office Staff on your side

The medical office staff member: they can be uncooperative, unfriendly and even seemingly uncaring. How can you reconcile your needs and rights with their schedule, training, orders...and attitude? Cooperation and a little give-and-take are key!

As the healthcare system is transforming under ACA ("Obamacare") implementations, medical providers have had to adapt to a dizzying number of new requirements, technological upgrades, legislative mandates and compliance deadlines. Sweeping changes are apparent: clinical staff spend much face-to-face time typing away on tablets, automated phone systems are the norm, phone calls rarely lead to a live person.

Cost-cutting measures brought on by the economic turndown, the ongoing drive toward leaner financial operations, finding additional resources to cover the price tags for new technology and lower insurance reimbursements have prompted offices to employ fewer staff, while workloads have increased in complexity and size.

Healthcare workers are too often overworked, understaffed and overwhelmed. As a billing manager and primary patient contact for 20+ years, I understand their frustrations but this is the career they chose. Here are some tips to turn these employees into allies.

1. Politeness goes a long way

The old standard way of being demanding, using abusive language, "showing who you are" may get you a result in the short term. But a bit of caution: you will be tagged as "difficult". Perceived mistreatment of one staff member gets around, and passive collective resistance applies.

2. Required: a little patience

Understand that the receptionist has no power over the doctor falling behind on his schedule, or that your labs can't be drawn without a MD signature. Pushing staff around will not get the doctor out of another exam room faster. Electronic Health Records orders take more time to generate than a scribble on a piece of paper.

Do reschedule if the wait is too long. As this is not your fault, the office should be receptive.

3. Mistakes happen

Reporting a clinical error to the physician immediately is crucial. Bring ongoing or un-rectified administrative errors to the attention of the office manager. An occasional blunder should be corrected, blamed on a temporary but uncommon lapse in efficiency and forgotten.

4. Do your share

At your first visit, bring your ID and insurance card (legally required to be copied into your chart). Give an up-to-date medication list and the name of other treating physicians. Indicate the contact info of your preferred pharmacy. Bring a translator if necessary, and one support person to take notes and help you remember your questions. More is a crowd, and too disruptive.

Consider booking the first appointment of the day or after lunch for follow-up visits. Fridays are usually lighter days; your wait time will be shorter. Report any changes to your medication list, insurance coverage or health history. Follow up on authorization requests, labs results or prescription orders; waiting for a call may cause unnecessary delays. Confirm any new physician you might be referred to, contracts with your insurance network.

Collaboration is one of the Cs in Success (or is it cooperation??). Helping the staff, with a minimum of effort on your part, will pay off, especially when you ask for a favor or expedited action. But don't forget your rights and stand by them!

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