

7 TIPS ON HOW TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL PATIENT-CENTERED PRACTICE

PATIENT CENTERED CARE ISN'T A NEW IDEA

The Institute of Medicine identified PCC as a key component in quality as far back as 2001. In recent years, there's been a resurgence in effort to remedy practice protocols to reflect a more patient centered model. As value based medicine quickly eclipses the fee for service structure of the past, it's integral for practice success to pay primary attention to the patient's whole health – mental, physical, emotional, and financial. The term, "patient centered care" is used widely. Defining it is a key to understanding the importance of the model and informing every day protocol to include a more patient centered approach. In practice, patient centric care often takes its ideas from the commercial business model because they have always concerned themselves primarily with patient satisfaction. Commercial marketing also targets and identifies the ideal consumer for a more personalized experience. This is where patient centered practices need to be – using all of their data and protocols to meet and understand the individual patient's needs.

THE BENEFITS OF PATIENT CENTERED CARE IN PRACTICE

For most practices, patient centered care is a collaboration in caregiving. The protocol is designed with the patient's needs in mind, so it extends beyond simply treating the illness or symptoms. Often the collaboration can include family members, especially in cases of chronic conditions or long term illness. Patient centered care also caters to the need to involve other partners in healing, including multiple specialists and other disciplines associated with the patient's state of mind and wellness.

There are myriads of ways to incorporate patient centered models into your practice and the benefits can be outstanding for both the practice and the patient.

Some key benefits associated with a successful integration of the patient centered care approach include:

Improved Revenue Cycle Management

Patients who have access to better budgeting options and transparency in payment schedules pay their bills in a timelier manner. With rising deductibles and insurance premium costs, financial concerns are often the most crucial to overcome in encouraging patients to see their physicians with the regularity necessary for optimal health.

Higher Patient Satisfaction

One of the primary goals for patient centered care is in improving their overall satisfaction with your practice and their treatment. While this is excellent for the business side of your practice, it also encourages better mental and emotional attitudes toward their care and may tip the scale toward better outcomes.

Better Patient Compliance

Patient compliance has often been difficult to judge and manage. When recommendations and therapies are not followed, the outcomes are often lower than desired. The patient centered approach encourages patients and family members to take an active part in their treatment options. They're in control of the decision-making and are offered sources to help with increased education about their health and overall condition. When patients understand the "why" of a treatment protocol, they're more likely to follow up and monitor their own health with greater care.

7 TIPS TO CREATE A PATIENT CENTERED PRACTICE

Knowing that a patient centered practice can be beneficial and developing one are two different things. Theoretically, it sounds like an excellent idea. But your leadership and staff may be confused about where to start, what to change, and how to go about the process.

Trying to accomplish an all at once major overhaul in your practice can be daunting and sometimes counterproductive. You also likely have the mechanisms for implementing smaller changes that can bring you toward a more patient centered approach in smaller steps. This option can allow for better staff training and you can analyze the benefits of individual changes with more clarity.

These seven tips can help you focus your efforts:

1. Start with Understanding the Patient's Perspective

The patient centered approach starts with the patient. In most practices, protocols are determined by the best and most convenient way for staff to function. That's an important component but you can't discount the process for the patient. For instance, it was traditionally easier for the front office staff to deal with insurance claims and then bill the patient after services were rendered. For administrative efficiency, that worked as a more streamlined system and it saved the front desk from having to train in how to encourage prompt payment from patients. That model is less effective today because the patient's total due is often far greater than it was in the past. Using this outdated model today would put an undue burden on your revenue cycle management process and the patient's budget.

Understanding your patient's concerns and perspective is key to supporting their needs. Each patient is unique, so there will be some variables and there are a few ways that you can approach your research to give you a fuller picture.

Ask the Patients

This might come in the form of a questionnaire or survey or you might simply have an informal conversation with each patient during a portion of their visit and note their concerns. Many patients won't include all of their likes or dislikes but taking all of the data into account will give you a fuller picture – especially when you see the same complaints and praises repeated.

Make Full Use of Your Reporting

The reporting features for your EHR can give you an excellent look at each point of your practice, from billing to diagnosis to outcomes to patient cancellations. All of this information can be useful in determining where your practice might have pain points. Pain points are often an indication that there's a disconnect that can be fixed to improve the overall experience.



2. Assess Your Current Process from Start to Finish

Changing any protocol starts with a full understanding of how it currently works. Your assessment should include every part of the way your practice works, at least as it relates to patients. Some key focal points might include:

Scheduling

One pain point for many practices is the process in admitting. This might mean rethinking the way patients are scheduled to allow better time for consultation or the way that they're admitted. Often the front office can back up because people need to check in with one or two individual staff members. These issues can be alleviated using other check in models, such as kiosks or online check-ins.

Physician Time During Scheduled Visits

Over scheduling the office means that physicians are often stretched for time. Many physicians had issues moving over to EHR systems because they believed the extra burden of inputting information took away from their ability to truly connect with patients. If your practice finds this to be a pain point, it may be worth it to invest in a scribe to allow physicians to forego notations during the actual exam. Allowing for more time in between scheduled appointments can also give the physician ample time for those patients who would like to talk more about options or overall health concerns.

Financial Counseling

If you're noticing issues in your revenue cycle management, it's a good indication that the patients may need more resources to understand billing and their financial responsibilities. Many practices benefit from offering financial counseling for new patients to understand the way the practice bills or to set up payment protocols in advance.

Access to Resources

Patients today are educated on their health and want to be part of the decision-making process. Your practice can help them to monitor their health by offering resources in ways that best meet their needs. This might include pamphlets and literature that's accessible for them to take home and information that's located in an easy to find place on your website.

Encouraging Family Involvement

For older patients, younger patients, and patients with ongoing chronic issues, it can be beneficial for them to have a family member with them during visits to help understand information about their treatment. Often a second set of ears can help them to stay on track once they're outside of the office.

3. Use Your Analytics and Reporting

Your EHR offers robust reporting options that allow you to view different aspects of your practice and individual patients. About 90% of office-based practices have started using an EHR system, which is phenomenal progress over year's past. However, not all practices are using their systems to its full potential. That means there's still room to grow and really use all the power of that database to improve the patient experience and outcomes.

If your office isn't sure if it's taking advantage of the reporting features and different technological advances offered by the software, contact your vendor to request options for advanced training. A good policy is to appoint a person within your staff to act as a point person for the system. They can act as a resident expert, so that staff members don't need to guess about how to use tools associated with your system. The point person can also take charge of communicating any new updates and changes to the rest of the staff.

4. Think Outside the Box and Outside Your Specialty

A patient centered approach includes emotional, spiritual, and whole body wellness. This can include resources for your patients to find help with meditation or physical therapy. It may also include referrals for psychologists or therapists. Many practices offer advice and resources for healthy life choices, as well, such as diet plans and physical activity. We know that all of these things can play into the patient's level of physical health and their overall mood.

5. Make Technology Work for You and Your Patients

Patients today are increasingly using their phone to access everything from a parking space to their next shoe purchase. Building a web portal and phone app for your practice means that your patients will have 24/7 access to the resources your practice provides. You can set web portals so that patients can access their records, schedule their appointments, and pay outstanding bills. You can also include value based content to help educate patients.

There are still patients who prefer phone reminders and to pay their balance by check or bank card. It benefits your practice to provide the most options to keep communication open with patients in the way that THEY are most comfortable. Patients who prefer to be reached via text will more often pay attention to that type of communication. If you send that same patient a snail mail bill, they may not open it. But if you send them a text reminder with a link, they're more likely to click through and finalize on the spot. The patient is also far more satisfied with the experience when you cater to their needs.

6. Offer Resources at Every Turn

A patient centered approach puts the patient in the driver's seat for their own health. Healthcare today is a large expense and patients want to be able to make informed choices about the best treatment options for their budget and best health.

For your patients to truly be in charge of their healthcare decisions, it's important that they have access to all the reliable resources possible. It's also important for you to educate patients on the less than reliable sources they may fall prey to online. There are some excellent benefits to being able to access so much information, but there is a downside. Patients often find social media posts and "health guru" websites that are not reliable and often geared to sell some program or supplement. This can be the bane of a physician's existence.

Some of these sites, fad diets, and supplements might be fine but it is something to be aware of and to educate patients on when needed.

For your practice, it's important to offer patients a wealth of reputable resources that they can easily digest. Many patients won't engage well with medical journals. You might do well to include more mainstream but reputable publications or update your own blog or news section with audience friendly content.

7. Get Your Team Invested in the Process

The best way to secure successful adoption of patient centered care is to get your entire staff invested in the process. Practice staff members are often wholeheartedly invested in the patients' best outcomes to begin with, so adding patient centered models can be an exciting option. Keep your staff engaged in the overall success of the adoption by sharing benchmarks and optimal results widely. You may also need to mandate certain protocols or use workflows to ensure that the entire staff works in the same way through each process.