Exceeding Patient Expectations: 6 Simple Techniques

Surveys show patient expectations are changing. Here are six practical techniques to help physicians meet those expectations and stay competitive.

Source: Physicians Practice

Like most physicians, I have seen how healthcare reimbursement is changing. Patients are expected to pay between 25 percent and 30 percent of their own healthcare expenses this year. That is more than ever before. As a result, patients are beginning to expect a higher level of care and engagement. They want more and better access to their own medical information and to their healthcare providers.

According to research from the Deloitte Center for Health Solutions, two thirds of patients would actually consider switching to a physician who offers access to medical records through a secure Internet connection. Additionally, the Optum Institute has released data that a majority of patients want to communicate online with their physician about their health, receive electronic reminders, and view medical records online.

As part of a process I call "heads-up medicine," which is about using technology to engage patients and keep your focus on them and not on the device or software, here are six techniques I suggest you begin using as a way to engage patients better and increase your competitive edge:

1. **Share preventive care guidelines and recommendations.** Most EHRs offer recommendations for preventive care based on gender, age, and other factors. Take the time to walk through these with the patient and discuss them.

2. **Show trends in the patient’s health over time.** Sometimes it’s hard for patients to visualize the changes in their health. An actual graph or chart that shows changes in blood pressure, weight, or other health indicators may help patients understand the change and your concerns. Showing actual images can be helpful as well. I have had patients who finally made an effort to quit smoking after seeing the actual CT showing the damage to their lungs.

3. **Print health educational information.** Take advantage of health information resources in your EHR. Patients often find it helpful to have more information to read at home and reference later. This is another area where I have seen patients who are much keener on taking steps in their own wellness after receiving handouts. This is especially true around simple preventive care topics like sunscreen and antioxidants.

4. **Print a visit summary.** Even if you have opted out of meaningful use, printing a visit summary is another really useful tool for patients. Again, I find that patients are grateful to have the information printed out and are more likely to be compliant with getting needed tests or taking medications.

5. **Use your patient portals.** Patient portals are the tool of the future. It may be the most critical solution available to you to help engage patients. Not only can it be used by patients to review their medical record, see lab results, or send a message to their physician, it also has a revenue component. Many portals allow patients to view and pay their bills online.

6. **Allow patients to see your notes.** I know that many physicians are uncomfortable with this, but the recent Open Notes trials have shown us that patients want to see their records and may be more compliant and satisfied when they do. If you can’t provide complete notes through a portal, consider other ways of offering access to visit notes for patients. Times are changing and all of us will have to change with them. It isn’t just meaningful use or CMS mandating some of these changes. It is coming directly from patients.

According to the National Partnership for Women and Families, 80 percent of patients who have access to their health information through an EHR use it. There is no denying it is what patients want and if you want to stay competitive in a changing healthcare landscape, you’ll need to offer the solutions that patients are asking for.
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