

Shifts to Improve IAMES Patient Relations

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IAMES providers, like any other business, need good customer relations to be successful. Unfortunately, we have few role models of good customer relations, as every day we deal with companies that don't live up to our expectations. It could be the cable company who tells you their installer will show up "sometime between 8 and 4." Or it could be the bank teller who doesn't know your name, account, or business. Or maybe it's the airline that serves a small bag of pretzels instead of lunch during your midday flight. Are these businesses meeting your needs or their own?

Durable home equipment medical care, costs are going up, service is going down, and personal contact is far removed from what it used to be. While you still by necessity make house calls, are you truly making a connection? Are you always selling your company's unique attributes? The time has come to make some changes so you can better meet your referral sources, your patients' needs and attract more of both to your company.

Shift #1 Try "Dating" Your Patients

The key to being in tune with your patients' needs is to form better relationships with them. Cultivating patient relationships is much like dating; it requires the right amount of thoughtful planning and preparation, intelligent nurturing, diligent caring – even break-ups at times.

Patience pays huge dividends in your quest for the perfect relationship. Remember when you were in high school and you wanted to date someone? You thought about it. You imagined being on dates together. You might have even imagined going steady with that person, or maybe even marrying him/her. You realized, however, that the first step was to ask the person out. Patient care is similar. To court your patients, you need to:

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D - Dazzle patients with your service.

A – Anticipate your patients’ needs by emphasizing caring over costs.

T – Treat your patients well by being a problem solver. Understand their concerns and treat the whole person, not just the symptoms.

I – Innovate by understanding most rules should be flexible.

N – Nurture your employees and suppliers by giving them the same care and respect you want them to give your patients.

G – Guarantee you stay in business by making sure you have a great patient service plan for suppliers, employees, and your patients, and then ensure that your employees understand it and follow it especially when they are in the field.

Shift #2 Become Problem Solvers

The key difference between other service providers and healthcare providers is that HME staff needs to be “problem solvers.” So become an interpreter of what patients need and value. Advertise your ability to solve your patients’ problems. They made the choice to come to your company and use your services. Once they’re in your facility, prove that you deserve their business. They are now in your hands and dependent on your wisdom to provide a solution.

Too often, administrators, company executives, and managers stay in their offices sitting at their desk. They may hear of deteriorating conditions in the companies that they lead, but they do not see the conditions for themselves. No substitute for firsthand information and direct contact exists. To service your patients you need committed employees, and you need suppliers that can reliably deliver the products you provide to your patients. Companies must listen to their patients, suppliers, and employees to make sure all needs are being met. In addition, remember, just because your company has followed a certain procedure for 30 years does not mean it is the best way to handle something. Don’t be a slave to tradition.

Here are some additional shifts to help make your own patient relations more personal and productive.

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Shift #3 Show what you offer. Dazzle your patients with your knowledge. Show them you know your business and demonstrate your expertise. You need to showcase your knowledge as you understand your patients' needs. Identify, individualize, and continuously interact with patients. These personal interactions force you to grow and serve.

Shift #4 Create an individualized patient plan. Patients have heard it all. They want to know why your suggestions are the best solution to their needs. They want to know how you have individualized your treatment plan to them. This is their life. They want to know that you care, that you understand their fears, and that you will treat them as individuals.

Shift #5 Nurture your patients. No two patients are alike. One-to-one interaction allows personalized, relevant, useful, and nurturing contacts to be managed as a process. Even the most inarticulate nurturer can be supported with an online menu of letters, memos, notes, and other expressions of true sentiments. Treat your patients the way you want to be treated.

Shift #6 Offer targeted, precise solutions. Do not offer a "historical" approach to a problem. When the pilot of a fighter jet has his target in site, he gets a tone, which tells him that he has locked onto his target. We get "tones" all the time, but do we listen? Most patients will tell you what they *want*. They provide the information you need to be successful. Unfortunately, most peoples do not really listen. They tell the patient what they have been programmed to say. Instead, they need to be flexible in their approach. Manage the patients' expectations. Cater to their fears. Calm them with sound information and sell them on your company by being solution providers. We trust is high selling is not required.

Shift #7 Focus on keeping your current patients. Just like any business, you'll spend more money to get a new patient than to keep an old one. So why do we forget about the patients we have and constantly try to get new ones? A simple follow up once a year by email, phone, or a personal meeting with each patient to determine their needs will be rewarding to both patient and staff. At this time you can ask for a testimonial that you can show to other prospective patients. If they are unhappy with your service, they will now tell you they can't provide a testimonial.

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Here is your chance to hear their tone and react accordingly. Moreover, stop offering knowledge. That right! Knowledge you get from books or today, the Internet. Wisdom you get from experience. In addition, when you offer experience price is no longer an objection. Offering wisdom builds trust. Trust is greater than wisdom. When your patients trust you, selling is not required.

Shift #8 Stay positive. Use emails, phone calls, and personal notes for making “touches that matter.” People remember people who intentionally create experiences that make them feel special. Keep the tone positive. Often, patients weren’t happy that they were sick. Let them know you care.

Shift #9 Take pride in your solutions but don’t take all the credit. An attitude of gratitude with your team shares the results and encourages continued nurturing. Make sure your staff understands their role in keeping your patients satisfied. Nurture this relationship. Dissatisfied employees cannot keep your patients satisfied.

Shift #10 Don’t rest on your successes. Without a regular maintenance program, your patients will not return to your company when the need arises. In fact, forty percent of all patients probably won’t choose you again. As such, you will lose revenue, referrals, and continuity. So, stay in touch often. Remember, “Patients require patience”

Shift #11 Stop pondering the past and begin nurturing the future. Failure is the second cousin to success. Realize that shifts happen. They take time. If your patience fails, learn from it.

Shift #12 Remember to DATE your patients. If your IAMES Company is going to compete in today's fierce marketplace, you must think progressively. The first place to take action is with your patients. They are no longer loyal. Price being equal, they really don't care if you have worked with them for years, unless you have formed a relationship and become a problem solver for them. That will ensure they return to your company whenever the need arises.

By forming caring and open relationships with your patients, you will keep the patients you have and attract more. Take the time you need to develop a plan that will improve the company experience for your patients. Once implemented, your IAMES Company will be ready for whatever changes come its way.

If your customer staff can assist your patients more effectively, they you are more able to deal with all the management issues including government intervention, reimbursements, and profitability. But that's another entire program we could talk about in the future.

You need patients and they require your patience and skills.

Remember, its like DATING and we all know that example

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