

By Cynthia Matossian, MD, FACS



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# Patient surveys give us insights into our patients' minds

Generating feedback is a vital step toward improving your practice.

**T**hese days, patients judge practices in ways physicians and their staff might have never imagined. The modern patient is apt to bring complaints to the Internet, where she can find myriad websites eager to publicize any reviews from the most endearing to the most venomous. Since the Internet is also where prospective patients are researching their medical options, virtual reviews can have a real-world impact.

## KEEP COMPLAINTS OFF-LINE

With patient surveys, our practice decided to beat patients to the punch. We send satisfaction surveys after every visit to patients who provide us with

their e-mail address. If patients are less than satisfied, instead of giving them the opportunity to vent on a public forum, they receive our personalized survey to complete. It usually placates patients and, this way, if patients have a complaint, it goes directly to us and we can address it privately. The survey can be completed anonymously if a patient wishes.

## A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY

We created our own survey in lieu of using a generic one. The survey has 11 questions and polls the patient about each step of his visit, from the first call to his interaction with the doctor and billing.

Each survey concludes with an optional section in which the patient can add any additional information she wishes to share.

## POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Our practice has a policy that helps motivate staff and foster a little healthy competition. When a staff member gets an unsolicited positive mention, by name, on a patient survey, that staff member is rewarded a

\$10 gift card to a local business.

## MANAGING COMMENTS

Once a week, our management team reviews the comments. When the surveys include negative feedback, we have the appropriate manager take it to the individual responsible. For instance, if the patient says the billing department gave her incorrect information, the manager of our billing department will contact both the patient and the staff member in question.

This way, patients get a direct response from the appropriate party and the staff member can relate his side of the story.

## MEANINGFUL USE

In the near future, Meaningful Use Stage 2 will require practices to have a percentage of patients complete some form of evaluation. It's best to ingrain patients' reviews into your practice culture now so your team is prepared for the upcoming requirements. Most importantly, viewing the patient comments as valuable tools will help your practice maintain a competitive edge. **OM**

