Head off patient complaints with good customer service by _Joanne Finnegan_ | Jan 10, 2017 1:00pm

Good customer service enhances the patient experience.

Good customer service is one way to keep patients happy, which is good for patient satisfaction, online reviews and quality scores.

"In the age of social media, it is especially important that patients don't leave angry or without some type of resolution because then the patient will seek out other outlets—like Facebook or Healthgrades—to share their feedback," Fadi Hachem, manager of patient experience at Midwest Orthopedics at Rush located in Chicago, told Physicians Practice.

One study found that about half of Americans read healthcare reviews and two-thirds use them to make a healthcare decision, so a bad review can be disastrous for a practice.

Here are some ways practices can improve their customer service:

Acknowledge patient wait times. Long wait times are a frequent customer complaint. However, patients do understand that unpredictability is part of a doctor's work. How your practice responds can make a difference. Be sure doctors acknowledge that the patient had to wait to be seen and apologize for the delay. Staff should also update patients when there is a delay.

Make a good impression. A first impression can determine whether a patient will return to a practice and will refer others, says **Todd Minars, M.D., a dermatologist in Hollywood, Florida**. So when patients face a long wait, give them a pager device and send them for a complementary coffee at a nearby shop. Or offer free Wi-Fi, tablets and handheld video games to distract patients.

Offer personalized care. While doctors have many patients, don't treat people as if they are on an assembly line. Treat patients as if they are family, says John Kona, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon in Virginia. Be sure you take patient concerns seriously and that staff have a good attitude.

http://www.fiercehealthcare.com/practices/head-off-patient-complaints-good-customer-service