

PRACTICE PEARLS

Reach staff easily with a handheld phone system

When constructing our office, we looked into various staff-notification systems, including room flags and an intercom, but both of these have limited uses. For us, the best solution was an expandable phone system with handsets that the physicians and medical assistants carry. Most expandable phone systems accommodate 10 to 12 handsets, include an intercom function and are relatively inexpensive.

This system has kept our staff from wasting time trying to find each other in the office. Medical assistants can work on other tasks until a physician or other staff member calls them to help with patient care or another duty. The front-desk staff can also call any staff member to inform them of urgent messages or important phone calls that are on hold.

Craig Endo, MD
Pomona, Calif.

Help patients understand blood sugar tests

My patients often don't understand the difference between the findings of a finger-stick blood-sugar test and an A1C test. I use an analogy to help explain it: The finger-stick test is like taking a picture of your blood sugar. It tells you what your blood sugar is at that moment in time. The A1C test is like taking a video of your blood sugar level;

it tells you your average blood sugar level during a three-month time period.

Marguerite Duane, MD, MHA
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Strengthen your interpersonal communication skills

Interpersonal relationships are a lot about making others feel important, and one crucial way to accomplish this is by practicing intelligent listening. Try these tips during your daily discussions:

- Be present in the conversation. Don't think about how you're going to respond before the other person has finished what they're saying. Listen first.
- Ensure that you've understood correctly. Double-check that you understand the meaning of what the person is trying to say.
- Encourage communication. Use short verbal phrases and non-verbal cues like saying "uh huh" and nodding your head to make it clear that you're listening.
- Don't interrupt to correct the other person or insert your opinion.

Source: Hicks R. Advocacy vs. influence. *Phys Exec J Med Manag.* Nov/Dec 2009:72

Inform patients of wait times

If a patient cannot be taken into an exam room within minutes of his or

her scheduled appointment, have the receptionist explain the delay when the patient arrives and give him or her an anticipated wait time. If you're running a half-hour late, the patient might be able to use the time to run an errand or might need to make alternative arrangements at work or home. Remember that an explanation before a delay carries much more weight than an apology after the fact.

Source: Adapted from Kelsey-Mendez W. Simple ways to make waiting more patient friendly. *Fam Pract Manag.* January 1998:72; <http://www.aafp.org/fpm/980100fm/marketing.html>.



Consider online yoga for patients with back pain

For my patients who suffer from low-back pain, neck pain or anxiety and want non-pharmacologic relief, I recommend a web site called Yoga Today (<http://www.yogatoday.com>). The site offers members a free weekly video class, and I advise my patients who are yoga beginners to note the skill level of the free class and avoid advanced classes.

To become members, patients simply sign up on the web site. If they enjoy it, they can have unlimited access for just \$10 a month. For my patients, it's a selling point that their doctor is also a member of the site and participates in a yoga class regularly.

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