

Patient-Doctor Relationship

In the world of insurance industry dictating covered and non-covered services, rules of providing bundled procedures, and fee schedules allowing only capped "contractual" dollars to be paid for visits and procedures, it is easy to forget that patients-doctor relationship remains the most crucial part of delivery of health care.

Simply, if patients do not like the doctors they do not come back to see them. So how to make sure that that very special relationship does not get devaluated? There are many ways in which doctors can develop supportive systems in order to free their own time to spend it with their patients and build mutual trust.

Hiring billing personnel who is trained and wishes to continue the training on the job is one part of a complex solution. Well prepared billing managers should make sure that all personnel knows the regulations from public carriers and private insurance. They also audit and verify proper coding and documentation. Self-auditing of documentation requires a lot of time but, in the end, pays off not just in time but in strong preventive system of proper compliance.

Complimenting the clinical staff with physician extenders: physician assistants or nurse practitioners is another way of managing time with patients. Doctors are needed to detect and diagnose an initial medical problem and discuss treatment options with patients. Delivery of actual procedures can be fulfilled by extenders who are licensed and skilled to conduct almost all procedures under doctors' supervision. They often receive their training directly from a doctor they work with and thus, their medical practicing style aligns with their doctor's.

Discussing medical problems is our main role in health care delivery but we should not underestimate the value of 'small talks'. Our patients like being noticed and remembered. They enjoy jokes or some off records discussions about their favorite sport teams or grandchildren.



Not only it makes our relationships with them more personable but often allows us to open much more serious health discussion. Even very brief listening to their stories may assist us in making a better medical decision.

Unfortunately, our health care system does not let us practice fully personalized medicine. However, we should make the best attempt to extend our conversations beyond the reason for a visit and prescription. If we do so, not only we find our daily work to be more enjoyable and less stressful but we also develop an old-fashioned communication between a patient and his doctor that contributes to our mutual benefit and satisfaction. Old-fashioned and not computerized conversation makes us better medical providers and simply better humans. Our patients receive our advice based on medical knowledge but appreciate a human touch coming with the advice.

I believe that human touch is what protects true uniqueness of patient-doctor relationship.

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