

The ABCs of
PATIENT ENGAGEMENT

If you were like most high schoolers, you probably read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in your English class. The dad in the story, Atticus Finch, is literature's most famous lawyer. He's also just an all-around good guy. At one point, he gives some sage advice to his daughter, Scout:

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

What does this have to do with how you run your practice? Plenty. Your patients are your lifeblood, but too often their needs get trumped by the needs of the practice. You can remedy this by taking the time to see things from their perspective – by walking around in their shoes for a while (walking around in a patient's skin is discouraged by the American Medical Association).



ENGAGEMENT CAN BE A WONDER DRUG.

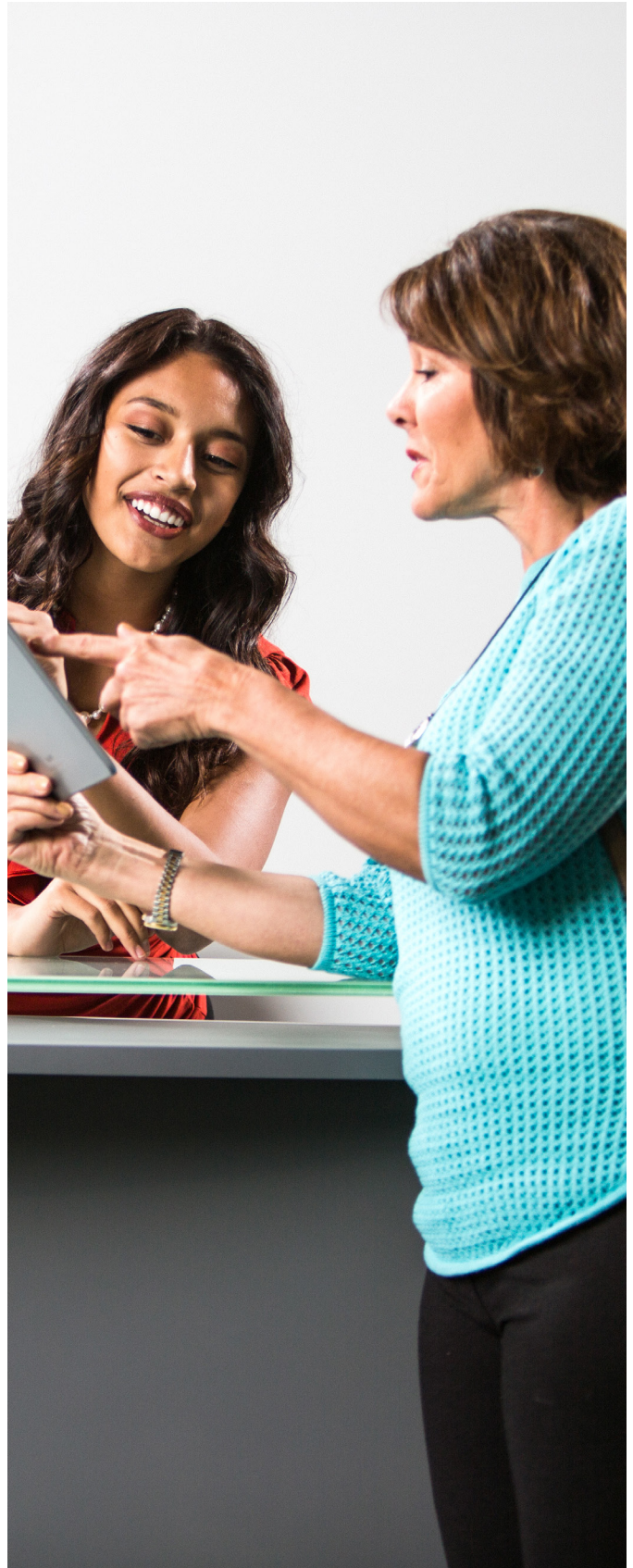
Improving the patient experience will inevitably improve their engagement. And that's a good thing. According to a report from Physicians Practice, "it ensures better care follow-up, medication adherence, patient education, and consumer loyalty toward the practice."¹

It's why healthcare expert Leonard Kish refers to patient engagement as "the blockbuster drug of the century."²

When your patients get involved and have access to their own charts,³ they're more likely to set goals, exercise and eat well. In other words, they'll do all the positive things you've always wished they would. And you won't even have to waste your time giving them the usual guilt trips.

And the good news doesn't stop there. Healthy patients are happy patients. With reimbursements tied to HCAHPS scores and the shift to value-based healthcare, positive outcomes can mean serious benefit to your bottom line.⁴ Over a lifetime, the average patient influences \$1,075,000 in physician-related expenses for his or her household.⁵ So by improving engagement, you'll get better retention and a correlating boost to revenue.

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WHAT YOUR PATIENTS WANT, WHAT THEY REALLY, REALLY WANT.

Now that we've established that getting your patients engaged is crucial to the success of your practice, the million-dollar question is how to do that. While there may not be a simple solution, there's the simple approach we mentioned earlier: put yourself in their shoes.

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Start by asking yourself what would bother you most if you were a patient at your own office. If you just answered that nothing would bother you about your practice, you're either delusional or you're running the world's only perfect practice. Even exceptional practices can always make changes that'll get their patients more involved and help them feel valued.

So, honestly, what would bother you as a patient at your office? If you think the wait time would be annoying, you're not alone. One survey found that 97% of patients were frustrated with wait times.⁶ How about the paperwork? Again, you'd be in good company. Research has shown that 60% of patients will choose a different provider if it means reducing the burden of filling out forms.³



PERMISSION TO ENGAGE.

You can actually reduce wait time and paperwork complaints fairly easily. Here are some things you can start doing in the short term to show patients how much you value them (and their time).

Answer phone calls by the third ring

Don't subject patients to blind transfers

Greet patients with a smile when they arrive for appointments

Offer online patient intake forms

Use patient photos & learn names & use them when appropriate

Give patients accurate wait time estimates

Apologize anytime there are delays

Keep the patient updated during visits

Help patients anticipate what will happen next

Provide relevant resources to help patients learn more

Tell your patients goodbye & call them by name as they leave your office

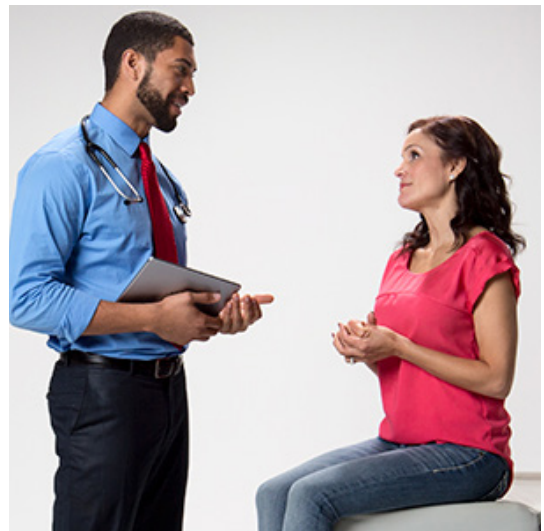
So there's the low-hanging fruit. If you're interested in cranking it up to "11", like Spinal Tap, then keep reading. These strategies are more substantial and require more effort to implement, but their positive impact can be immense.

ALLEVIATE THE AGONY OF BILLING... FOR EVERYONE.

This is always one of the biggest complaints patients have. In fact, more than 60% of patients are confused and frustrated by their medical bills.⁷ And get this—doctors hate billing just as much. More than 50% of providers say that patient payment collection is their biggest revenue cycle concern.⁸

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This concern is hardly misplaced. More than a quarter of private practice revenue comes from patient payments. And that percentage will only increase with the trend toward higher deductible health plans, coinsurance, and copays.⁹





PORTAL TO A WHOLE NEW WORLD.

You can simplify billing for yourself and your patients with a patient portal, which is the most comprehensive technological solution to improve your patients' experience. For example, AdvancedMD billing software lets patients securely view their bills online and pay with a credit card. This simplicity expedites payments and brings added financial benefit to your practice, because when patients are satisfied with the billing process they're five times more likely to refer your facility to their friends.¹¹

Beyond billing, portals get patients involved in their own healthcare. They provide a convenient way to communicating with your staff, submit patient forms online, and make refill requests. And with the AdvancedMD HealthWatcher feature, you can also send helpful reminders for flu shots, physicals and upcoming appointments.

“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.”

--John F. Kennedy

PHONING IT IN MAY BE THE BEST THING YOU EVER DO FOR YOUR PRACTICE.

Telemedicine is more popular than ever, so if you aren't currently using this technology, you need to get with the program. Your patients will thank you. Research shows that 80% of patients between the ages of 18-34 prefer virtual consultations to face-to-face meetings.¹⁰ And your older patients are generally excited about the prospect as well, with nearly half of patients 45 and older reporting that they're down with telemedicine.

Telemedicine offers your patients unprecedented convenience and accessibility. This is particularly true for rural, housebound, or elderly patients with limited mobility. It will deliver faster time to diagnosis and treatment, which results in better health outcomes and happier patients.

With the incredible benefits that telemedicine offers, it no wonder that patients consistently give their telemedicine consultations a positive rating.¹²



IT TAKES A VILLAGE.

Improving patient engagement requires every member of your staff to get involved. They all play a role in the patient experience, so help them realize their unique opportunity to make things better.

"I would argue that any healthcare group that doesn't work to instill a culture around that patient engagement is hobbling itself," says Paul Shenenberger, chief information officer for Summit Medical Group.¹³

Gather your team and identify what areas are most important for your practice to improve. Let everyone take part in the discussion so they know they have a voice. This helps them feel ownership for the ideas and makes them more likely to take action. And speaking of action, it's important to create action plans that will enable you to enhance engagement. It's like they always say, "If you fail to plan, then you fail to fan." Or something like that.





CONCLUSION

If someone had told you while you were in medical school that there were practice tools available that would increase patient compliance, improve outcomes, streamline your processes, boost payments and maximize reimbursements, you probably would've given just about anything to get them.

Well, those tools exist and they provide the ultimate win-win for both your practice and your patients. Give us a call today to get customized strategies for increasing your patients' engagement.

¹ "9 Ways to Increase Patient Engagement at Your Practice." Physicians Practice. June 8, 2016.

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³ Woods, Susan S et al. "Patient Experiences With Full Electronic Access to Health Records and Clinical Notes Through the My HealtheVet Personal Health Record Pilot: Qualitative Study." Journal of Medical Internet Research. March 2013. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3636169/>

⁴ "Better HCAHPS Scores Protect Revenue." HealthLeaders Media. September 28, 2016.

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⁵ Morrissey, David G. "The True Cost of Alienating Patients," Physicians Weekly. August 23, 2012.

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⁶ "Software Advice." The Cure for Wait-Time Woes Industry View Report." 2013. http://www.saimgs.com/imglib/other_pages/Melissa/How-to-Treat-Patient-Wait-Time-Woes-Industry-View-2013.pdf

⁷ Gooch, Kelly. "61% of Patients Confused by Medical Bills, Survey Finds." Becker's Hospital CFO. July 14, 2016.

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⁸ Lin, Jeff. "Trends in Healthcare Payments and Billing." Health System Management. August 8, 2016.

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⁹ Margolis, James, and Pope, Christina. "Perspectives on Patient Payments." MGMA Connexion. April 2010. P. 37.

<http://www.mgma.com/Libraries/Assets/Practice%20Resources/Publications/MGMA%20Connexion/2010/Perspective-on-patient-payments-MGMA-Connexion-April-2010.pdf>

¹⁰ Mordor Intelligence. "Global Telemedicine Market: Growth, Trends, and Forecasts (2015-2020)". August 2015.

¹¹ PwC's Health Research Institute. "Top Health Industry Issues of 2016: Thriving in the New Health Economy." December 2015. P. 7.

¹² Richardson, Lisa K. et al. "Current Directions in Videoconferencing Tele-Mental Health Research." Clinical Psychology: a Publication of the Division of Clinical Psychology of the American Psychological Association 16(3), 2009.

<http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2850.2009.01170.x>

¹³ "Leaning in to create a culture of patient engagement." Healthcare IT News. March 21, 2017.

<http://www.healthcareitnews.com/blog/cio-commentary-leaning-create-culture-patient-engagement>