

THE PHYSICIAN'S ROLE IN IMPROVING PATIENT SATISFACTION

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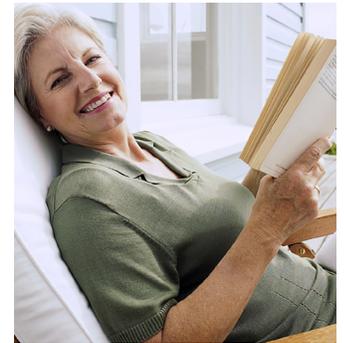
Patient satisfaction has become increasingly important in healthcare for a number of reasons. In competitive regions and cities, satisfaction plays a key role when patients are selecting a physician, practice, or healthcare facility.¹ In some cases, satisfaction is a consideration in reimbursement,² as well.

Physicians can play a key role in improving patient satisfaction scores.³ In my practice, the litmus test of satisfaction is when a pleased patient returns for a second procedure. A common example is when a patient has a positive experience with one shoulder operation and selects my practice again for surgery on the other ailing shoulder. In many cases, the best referrals come from prospective patients speaking with satisfied patients.

There are several key elements that influence patient satisfaction, starting with the patient's attitude and perception of the entire procedure. This is where physicians and their entire team play important roles. Patient communications are key touchpoints for physicians and the medical team in building trust and delivering satisfaction.⁴ Physicians must begin by managing expectations with frank pre-operative patient meetings. This is the time to introduce topics such as pain and recovery times, setting proper expectations that influence the patient's outlook and later affect experience and satisfaction. My patients also often weigh their level of satisfaction based on the surgical procedure itself and rehabilitation process.

For the majority of patients, pain management is one of the most significant measures of satisfaction.⁵ Physicians and medical teams can earn this satisfaction in two primary ways. First, it's important to ease the patient's anxiety about pain long before the surgery occurs. For example, shoulder procedures have the potential to be

some of the most painful, and this reputation for extensive pain often creates high anxiety. Speak openly with the patient and discuss solutions that will help minimize pain.



Secondly, physicians must ensure that pain is effectively managed during and after the procedure. **Studies show that pain relief is one of the biggest factors determining patient satisfaction with joint replacement surgery.**^{6,7,8,9} Effective pain management increases the ability for patients to begin and succeed with rehabilitation.¹⁰ This can affect objective outcomes such as range of motion and strength - also factors in patient satisfaction.

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With this in mind, selecting the most appropriate pain management solution can be one of the most significant decisions in influencing patient satisfaction.¹¹ Patients seek specific pain relief for their operative site without feeling "drugged," allowing them to maintain as normal a life as possible with the ability to return to work quickly. In my experience, regional blocks and compressive cold therapy are indispensable methods. Many of my patients report the use of fewer than five narcotic pills in two days, then convert to non-narcotic approaches. This is often an indicator of effective pain management. In

fact, based on the popularity of regional blocks, some patients have heard about it in advance and specifically request it.

Since satisfaction is based on the performance of all team members,^{1,2} coordination with your medical team is important. Your practice staff must be knowledgeable and able to answer questions. Even the responsiveness of the office staff plays a role in patient satisfaction.

Outside the practice, your team at the hospital or healthcare facility must also be focused on delivering high patient satisfaction. The anesthesia team, clinic nurses, and hospital nurses all need to know their role in the patient's journey. Anesthesiologists or their representatives should communicate with the patient at both the pre- and post-operative phases of the treatment. Following the procedure, nurses should call patients in the first three to five days after surgery to check on recovery progress. In the physical therapy stage, caregivers need to be knowledgeable on a variety of topics, particularly the selected pain management solution for each patient. This strong

communication helps reinforce the partnership with your patient.⁴

The new focus on satisfaction helps patients and improves teamwork amongst medical professionals.^{1,2}

Despite its current attention, the emphasis on patient satisfaction is a relatively new area of focus.^{1,3} In many cases, surgeons and anesthesiologists have not been trained to prioritize patient satisfaction – medical training often emphasizes technical skill and correct diagnosis, not satisfaction. The new focus on satisfaction helps patients and improves teamwork amongst medical professionals.^{1,2} Consider the recommendations above to help improve your patient satisfaction scores.

Brett Cascio, MD has a consulting/speaking financial relationship with Avanos Medical, Inc.

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