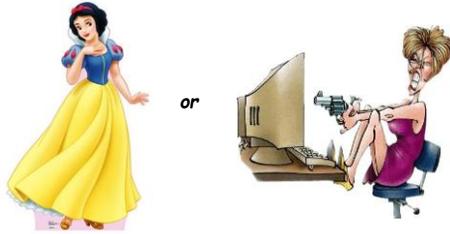


The Difficult Patient: The "Bad Kid" Scenario



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Are patients really "evil" or do circumstances make them appear that way ?!

Sometimes it is really hard
to tell the difference. And
quite honestly, when you have
a patient standing in front of you
yelling about something that is
not in your control, *or theirs*, does
it matter ?



Control

I did a very non -scientific
poll of the staff regarding
patient complaints. Not
surprisingly, a number of the
issues that were reported
were issues neither our clinic, or staff, had
control over. Yet, they heard daily about them
from angry or frustrated patients.



Because the patient felt they had no control of these "situations",
they needed to "vent" to
someone...the staff.
Although the staff
stated they didn't
take it personally usually,
they still didn't appreciate it... and
on a **bad** day, it was hard to remain polite.



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The Bad Kid Scenario

I truly believe that patients
do not wake up and decide
that they are going to come
to their appointment and
"give it to " the staff or
the doctor simply because
it would be something fun to do.



As a teacher I was trained that all kids were essentially good until proven otherwise !
So...if all kids are "good" - what's with "time outs", suspension and being grounded?



Phrases we use when someone, either you or the child, **has lost control** !

We can't give patients time outs or send them to study hall... but maybe we can maybe change the way we look at the patient's behavior



What Your Patients Are Complaining About...

1. Receptionist or technician was not friendly

The receptionist, or front desk, sets the tone for everything that is going to occur in the office from the minute the patient walks in. If it starts bad there, then the rest of the visit could start heading downhill fast.



Front desk staff need to be aware of their presentation to the patient. The phrases: too "efficient" (everything else was more important than me), didn't acknowledge me, ignored me, scolded me for not having the same information I had given to the person over the phone when I made the appointment... are *not* complimentary !

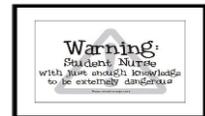


Technical staff needs to be aware during the exam to look at the patient, smile every once in awhile, and to treat the patient **like you care** that they are with you. If they feel you didn't care, they begin to feel they are being mistreated.



"They didn't care"

Perception will kill you ! I did an exam on a patient one afternoon. We smiled, we laughed, we got her to 20/20. I advised her there wasn't much change to her Rx, unless she wanted a new pair of frames or a different style - save herself some money. She thanked me for a "wonderful experience" and left.



(5) months later, I received a call from the patient representative that a patient had a rather severe complaint involving my clinic. The technician had **implied** that she was trying to "bilk" the system into giving her a pair of glasses she didn't need.

I was livid that one of my staff would be so rude! I pulled the chart and found out it was me! I then chastised myself as I had promised the patient rep I would do to the staff that was involved!



2. Why do I have to be dilated?

(also: I don't want drops and you just did that the last time)

Patients can and do have selective memories. When a patient is being scheduled, the scheduler should make sure to **remind them that they will be dilated** during this visit and **will be at the office for approx 1 ½ to 2 hours**.



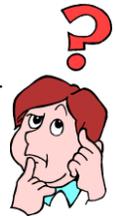
The technical staff needs to make sure that before they put the drops in - they talk to the patient about **why** they are going to "drop" the patient - and that they will probably put drops in every visit (i.e. diabetes or macular degeneration).

IF it is a child... you better explain to mom that the child won't like them, or you, and why you are doing this **before** you do anything!



3. Why do I have to: tell you meds every visit, have a vision/IOP check every visit, see the tech every visit?

Patients come to see the doctor, and don't want to "waste time" seeing staff. If their appointment is behind schedule, you are viewed as being another delay.



1. Re-educate
2. Re-assure
3. Re-affirm that you are going to get the patient ready for the doctor



4. Remind staff - it's not personal!

#3 rolls into #4... because they are worried about getting back to work, picking a child up from school, or they don't have money for the extra parking, their anxiety will turn into a "waiting time is excessive" complaint - and begin to rally the troops!



4. No parking spaces (or: parking is too expensive, or not close enough to the building)

Patients do not want to pay for parking - even if that parking is discounted. It is a sore spot. And if their appointment is running late, and their parking meter



is going to expire, they may even demand that you help pay for their additional parking. They will also start to become "disruptive" in your waiting room because of the "wait time". If they are on a fixed income, they **may not have** the additional money to pay to get out of the ramp.



Do you have a plan in place if the patient misses the last bus of the day? Or... they don't have the money for the fare increase?



5. Co-Pays: didn't tell me, didn't take it, didn't want it

Being asked for money and not being prepared or even scolded for not having it is embarrassing. Having to run to your car to get it is worse! What's your policy and is everyone consistent?



6. I asked for my records to be sent 3 weeks ago !!!!

- Records never received from another doctor's office
- Records **lost** and not available for visit
- Records misfiled

Patients do not like having to tell their story over and over - and they are not good at it!



You have no control over another office sending records in time for a patient's visit - but you can make sure your records are available for the appointment!

The patient should **never** hear: "Your file is lost". What does that say about your office?



7. Not enough help or too much help

Staff is hectic and not spending enough time with the patient or there is too many staff "standing around" and not doing anything !



8. I waited (2) months for this appointment and the doctor cancelled it again - now I have to wait another month!

Patients get very frustrated when they feel their time is not being respected - either in the clinic or during the scheduling process. Continual office reschedules may lose you a patient regardless of your reasons!



You can explain why you are canceling, but the patient sees it as:

- * they had to take a day off from work
- * their drivers license runs out earlier than the reschedule
- * it happens **all** the time to me
- * isn't my time as valuable as yours ?!



9. Dr Bill is too high, why is my insurance costing me more for less coverage, why do I have to pay for refractions, I came in for a medical reason it was not routine, the economy is bad and you medical people are gouging me to make up for the difference !



Most patients are satisfied with their doctors. But they *do* have complaints, especially about time spent in the waiting room and then, when they finally get in to see the doctor, that the doctor didn't spend enough time with them.



They Leave You Because....

- * Long Wait Times In The Office
- * Feeling "Neglected" - ex: calls not returned
- Couldn't schedule an appointment within a timeframe they needed/wanted
- Process Too Complex (portals hard to navigates)
- Limited Appointment Hours
- Office Appearance/ Staff Professionalism
- Lacking Customer Service (Front Desk/
- Perception versus Reception)

Mad or Disappointed?

Because we have not met their expectations, patients can develop an emotional response to the situation.



While we often see only anger, many times their feelings are despair, resentment, sadness or helplessness and even feelings that we let them down.

Patients Get Mad And We Want Them To Go Away !



This Is What Your Staff Wants

**GIVE ME A BREAK!
GIVE ME SOME SLACK!
GET OUT OF MY FACE!
AND GET OFF OF MY BACK!!**

Not my job...well - who's job is it ?!

We can't fix a lot of the "things" that upset patients, but we can fix the problems that we have control over:

**OURSELVES &
OUR ATTITUDES**



Yesterday I went to the doctor for my yearly physical. My blood pressure was high, my cholesterol was high, I'd gained some weight, and I didn't feel so hot. My doctor said eating right doesn't have to be complicated. He said just think in colors... fill your plate with bright colors... greens, yellows, reds, etc. I went right home and ate an entire bowl of M &M's!



Mary

Best friend, wife, soccer mom,
nice person !!!



The Bad Kid Scenario

Mary is 57 y.o. and today she has a doctor's appointment. When she woke up, the hot water heater in her house wasn't working again - so she had to take a cold shower because her husband left early for work and she is afraid to re-light the pilot light.



Mary has to park outside because their garage is a one car garage. Because of the cold shower - she is running behind. We got 5" of "partly cloudy" last night. Her son took her scraper because his broke. She uses the garage broom to clean her car... credit card to scrape the window - it breaks.



Traffic is backed up and she is now getting later for her appointment. If she is 15 minutes late, they may ask her to reschedule.



Funny - the doctor usually runs at least 1 hour behind!

She gets to parking lot, and finds that it is already full. Now she will need on street parking. There is a snow alert- so she can't park on the street. She has to wait for a car to come out of the ramp.



She races down the hallway to get to the clinic and sees that "Sheila", the "mean one" is at the desk today. She is always condescending, calls her "dear" and speaks way to loud.



But today seems to be a better day -she looks up and says : "Can I help you honey"?

"Do you have your co-pay?"

"I asked that and they said you would bill me."

"They would never say that - we always ask for a co-pay".

" My checkbook is in the car"

" Oh good - would you please go get it - I need to collect it or it's my butt ?"



Mary races back to the car, gets the wallet, races back to clinic. After waiting in line for 10 more minutes, she reaches for the card - it is still broken. She has no checks because her husband used the last one and forgot to tell her. Now Sheila agrees to bill her - after a heavy sigh as she keys it in.



She waits 35 minutes in the waiting room because she was "late" and lost her turn. It is now 1 hour, 10 minutes past her time. She told her boss she would only be gone 2 hours. He wasn't happy because it is year end.



The gum chewing technician finally calls her in. Never identifies herself. "Why are you here today". Mary is beginning to be unhappy about this whole experience; it's not the first time the staff has been rude. "Because you sent me a card." "Ma'am, please don't take it out on me!"



Feeling angry and irritated after her treatment, and feeling that the technician went way too fast on the refraction, she is finally put in the doctors room. She is now (2) hours behind her exam time. In walks a teenager... not her doctor. " He is out of town this week. I am seeing his patients for him - we do this all the time". No one called or asked Mary if that was ok.



"No one called me to tell me he wouldn't be here. I don't do well with the exam - and he is always so patient." "You'll be fine dear..." and begins the exam. Three minutes later, he is done. "Ok, looks good, we'll see you in (6) months."



"Wait a minute... what did you see ? What about my cataracts ? Do I need new glasses?" "I'll have the technician go over all that with you. Here's a pamphlet for you to read. You can call and let Dr. Jonas know when you want to do something with those cataracts"



Back in the waiting room waiting for the technician, Mary is confused. If everything is "good", why do I need to call Dr Jonas to have the cataracts out. Looking at the brochure - the cover reads: "What You Need To Know About Macular Degeneration"



She has now been here for 3 hours and $\frac{1}{2}$. Knowing her boss will be livid, Mary goes to front desk and says she can't wait any longer for the technician. "Ma'am, we are very busy. We are doing the best we can. You are just going to have to be patient and wait your turn!"



Mary leaves. She hears someone make a comment that *she* is being rude and inconsiderate. She leaves the parking ramp and remembers she has no checks and no credit card! She had 10.00 for lunch. Parking is now 9.50 - it usually is 3.00 for the first (2) hours. Mary will have no lunch, snack or soda for the rest of the day.



Mary - the bad patient



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