

OPTIMIZING OFFICE VISITS (CONTINUED)

Consults (continued)

It inspires trust when you encourage me to get a second opinion. Please do not leave it to me to ask.

Please discuss clinical trials that you deem appropriate, as well as standard therapies.

Please show me only the information that I'm ready to hear or see. If I tell you I don't want to see an actual scan that shows tumor spread, please, please respect my wishes.

Please respect, rather than discount, my level of knowledge.

Please ask me if I'd like copies of test results, and explain abnormal finding, or provide me with the educational materials necessary to interpret them.

Provide information about how I can prepare for the next visit, such as:

Authorizations? Referrals? Prescriptions?
Allergies? Medications and Supplement list?
Scheduling and charting test results?
Reporting adverse events?

Test Results

Please return results of scans and similar tests as quickly as possible to reduce my anxiety.

Please provide the following information about diagnostic tests, in order to reduce my anxiety:

- What will the test show?
- How do I prepare?
- What can I expect? How long will it be before I get the results.?



Preparing for Treatment Day

The more the patients know about what to expect, the less anxious they will be.

Please provide information on:

- How I should dress.
- What I should bring.
- How I can pass the time.
- Can someone stay with me?
- Can I eat first, or not?
- Should I take the usual medicines, or not?
- How long will I be there?
- Will I be able to return to work?
- Will someone need to drive me, and pick me up?



Can you provide a tour of the chemo room beforehand and introduce me to the staff who will be caring for me?

Side Effects and Symptoms

Please provide readable information about each of the chemo drugs I will be getting.

What symptoms or side effects are expected, and which require:

- Immediate attention?
- A call the next day?

How can I contact you?



If drugs to control nausea will be needed, please give the patient the prescription several days prior to the first chemo treatment.

Prior approval may be required by their insurance company. Delays - and unnecessary suffering - can be avoided with sufficient advance notice.

OPTIMIZING OFFICE VISITS

Patients' Perspectives:

“When I know what to expect, I’m less anxious and better able to participate effectively in the consult.”

“One day they were running quite far behind and I was amazed that when I did get seen, we had her full attention to every question we asked and never felt rushed at all.

...I couldn't do that, I would be stressing over the schedule, but I am glad my oncologist has that sort of concentration. I'm sure I made the delays even worse on the next people.”

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OPTIMIZING OFFICE VISITS

Personnel

Your personnel set the tone.

- Hire friendly, optimistic office personnel who genuinely care about patients.
- Please have your staff wear name tags. People like to know the names of those they speak with. First names are sufficient.
- If it is necessary to keep the glass in front of the staff area closed, encourage communications by putting a sign on the patient side to the effect that if patients or caregivers need anything, please tap on the glass or open it.
- Designate a staff person for patients to call if they have concerns or a problem - a contact person.
- If you are willing to communicate via email, please include your (or your staff's) email address on your appointment card, in addition to your telephone and fax numbers.
- Advise your personnel to reach out and comfort those who may be alone or seem apprehensive.
- Try not to leave anyone alone for too long.

Waiting Rooms

The more home-like it is the more relaxed and comfortable your patients – and your staff – will be.

Create a pleasant and friendly environment in the waiting room by including:

- flowers or live plants;
- aquarium with colorful fish;
- attractive (non-institutional) art;
- photographs of patient success stories (if HIPAA will allow);

- a wide variety of magazines that appeal to all ages (including small children) and interests, and sufficient lighting to read in comfort;
- a few lap throws; ill people sitting for long periods of time get chilly.

Remember odor control, which is especially important in a crowded small space. An air purifier might be helpful. And put a sign asking people to avoid using perfumes, etc.

Remember noise control. There should be sufficient insulation to prevent patients from overhearing other conversations in exam rooms. Easy-listening radio music can help, too, in the waiting room, and can make it seem less sterile. Omit televisions.

Easy access to restrooms is critical. If yours has a key, make certain it is hung in an easily accessible place that is readily visible. A "call button" in the restroom is a nice feature.

As you open and close your doors, think of your patients. Does it take both arms and a little muscle to open them? Patients may not have the strength to do so.

When choosing office furniture, please remember patients come in all sizes and may have special needs and limitations.

Kleenex boxes are essential.

A source of water and cups are nice. Providing coffee/tea/cocoa/hot water tray would be welcomed by patients who often must wait for long periods of time.

Utilize waiting time:

- Check if labs or imaging results have been received, and that authorizations and referrals have been obtained.
- Provide educational materials - such as answers to frequently asked questions.

- If possible, provide Internet connections – this is especially important for families who live in other states.
- Provide a display place for free newsletters or catalogs of items of interest to oncology patients (wigs, head coverings, etc.),
- Provide a bulletin board for notices of support groups, resources, or seminars of interest to patients
- Provide pamphlets on special services, such as pain specialists, nutritionists, care managers, and non-profit support organizations.

Consults

Caring, realism, inspiring trust and hope

Provide comfortable seating for my caregiver and the doctor in the clinic room.

Please read my chart before you come in.

Smile, and be attentive. Sitting communicates that this time belongs to me. It's comforting when you remember a few things about me.

Please do not make me feel rushed. Answer phone calls only when they are emergencies. Let me know if you are running late.

Be realistic, but *always* provide me with some hope.

Bring the medical terminology to my level.

Please acknowledge symptoms or feelings I describe. (Patients can know that something is wrong, even when it doesn't show up on lab tests.)

If you feel that I'm too overwhelmed to absorb the information, please schedule a second appointment for a few days later, and refer me to a care manager or other resources for assistance if needed.