

CHAPTER SIX:

Building Caring Relationships



What does it mean to care?

The essence of healthcare is caring, but caring is more than just a word. Caring is how we feel about our patients. It's how we provide services, treatment and support. Caring means more than simply being physically present. It means taking your patients' feelings into account and adapting your care to reflect their needs as well as their desires.

Developing caring relationships

The crucial first step in developing caring relationships is to consider others as special – and to treat them that way. When your patients recognize that you see them as important, they no longer view you as an “employee” or “staff member”. You become someone to be remembered, someone who keeps a patient’s best interests in mind.

Caring is reciprocal. Treat others as special, and in return you are more likely to be treated the same. Suddenly you are on the same side - you establish win/win relationships. Caring relationships, both at work and in your personal life, can make everything easier.

Let’s look at the opposite. Being treated with indifference can be de-meaning – we’ve all been handled like we are a number. Negative emotions follow, and often, instead of working together, you feel like you have to work harder to make your feelings and desires clear. You become a stronger advocate for yourself. We’ve all seen this dynamic, while shopping for clothes, auto repairs – in any buying situation. What starts off as a casual shopping encounter becomes antagonistic. When treated with indifference, your healthcare customers feel the same way.



#6 Building Caring Relationships

Caring occurs on individual as well as organizational levels. Many healthcare facilities have automated telephone-answering systems in place that triage patients before allowing them to speak with live operators. Automated answering services are a way of life, but organizational caring demands that patients can easily talk with a live person. Does your phone system allow easy access, a way to get to a real voice? It's possible and it shows your patient you value them.

Engaging patients as customers

By engaging patients as customers you are building a stronger relationship with them. Show patients that you respect them and that you value their participation in their own care. Provide a pleasant, positive experience to let them know that you see them as partners working towards the same goal.

As healthcare providers, your work involves many complexities. Focus on being efficient, fast, even-handed and accurate, but do not view efficiency as being robotic. Feelings are important. Taking the time to respect your patients' feelings is a crucial part of caregiving.

Valuing the Feelings of Others

Never overlook the feelings of others, your co-workers, families, or your patients. Healthcare providers are pressured to see more patients than ever, which can limit the time you can spend with any one patient. All encounters must be efficiently managed and it's essential you are fully engaged and not distracted. With practice and intent, you build caring relationships while providing efficient care.

Positive relationships are the linchpin of patient care. Your approach to forming and building relationships is crucial for patient satisfaction. It's pretty clear when a relationship works well. It's not so obvious when it doesn't.

The test is pretty simple. Ask a patient to describe the quality of care they received during their healthcare experience. Patients often describe their interactions with the nurse practitioners and doctors that cared for them or their interactions with healthcare professionals. Don't be surprised if caring tops their list and dictates how patients view their experiences.

Great relationships = great healthcare facilities

Great healthcare is about the care you provide and the caring way you provide it. You can't be great without excellent care and successful treatment, but you can be the best healthcare provider and still leave your patients feeling cold and unsatisfied.

Great relationships do not build themselves. We must use conscious effort and energy to form positive relationships. It requires intentional caring. That's what healthcare is all about.

You advocate for your patients, you provide care and caring, you are physically and emotionally present. Avoid making patients part of your routine; instead make them feel involved.

You gain insight from good relationships with your patients. Often what you learn makes a huge difference in patient care and the patient experience. When you know your patient you can provide truly personalized care.

There are three essential types of relationships

- 1. The relationship with your patients** – this core relationship is central to everything that you do on a daily basis.
- 2. The relationship with your colleagues** - the team members you work with everyday are like your family. A positive working relationship increases morale and improves the level of care that everyone provides.



3. The relationship with yourself - when you feel good about yourself, your profession, and your organization you are better prepared to deliver the compassionate, quality care that led you to the healthcare industry in the first place.

How do you view your role within your healthcare organization?

Everyone wants to be respected and appreciated as professionals. Building caring relationships may seem like a lot of work, but it can be fun. When you're having fun, you'll enjoy your work and everyone around you will enjoy working with you.

Empathy and openness

Empathy is not the same thing as sympathy. Sympathy is how you feel about someone. If you feel sorry for a person's situation, you feel sympathetic. Empathy means you share someone else's feelings. It is the ability to understand another's experience, to communicate and confirm that understanding and then to act in a helpful manner.

Healthcare With Feelings: Creating the Ultimate Patient Experience



Displaying empathy to your patients during clinical situations can improve their level of satisfaction with your care. By improving their experience you can give them strength. By empathizing with your patients and their families, you help them look beyond feelings of negativity and hopelessness so that they can move forward and get past those experiences.

Empathy allows you to experience an emotional or painful situation together. This can help your patients feel understood and less alone. It helps to improve satisfaction regarding care and builds effective relationships with your healthcare customers.

Assignment

1. What can you do when interacting with customers to reinforce your interest in their needs and show them that you care?
2. Do you routinely maintain eye contact when interacting with others? Why do you think that is important in building solid relationships?
3. List 3 ways that you can empathize with your patients or their family members when building relationships:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
4. What can you do to better empathize with others? How can the organization support you?

CHAPTER SIX REVIEW - **Points to Remember**

- *Your patients' feelings are central to providing exceptional care*
- *Optimize the brief time you spend with your patients*
- *Patient relationships with their healthcare providers often define their entire experience*
- *Your empathy will improve their satisfaction*