

How to master the patients happy



The [Guide to Delivering Superior Patient Experience in Private Practice](#) is a new series designed to give independent practitioners the knowledge and tools needed to enhance patient experience before, during and after care.

It will be packed full of information that will, hopefully, prompt you to either start or refine your patient experience strategy.

Here [Jane Braithwaite](#) begins by clarifying what we mean by patient experience and why it matters.

In future articles, she explores this in more detail, including:

- How to get started with your strategy
- How to put patients first
- Engaging and inspiring your team through to measurement
- How to continually drive change and further enhance patient experience

art of keeping



What is patient experience and why does it matter?

Patient experience is more than just providing superior clinical care. It is the sum of quality, safety and how we care for patients.

Every single encounter a patient has with your practice matters and forms the patient experience, whether these interactions are online, face to face during surgery or your follow-up care.

Patient experience starts with a patient's gut feeling about your service in the earliest stage, which may be at the point where they start to research their symptoms online and discover your website or when they discuss their symptoms with a GP or friend who recommends you.

Patients have greater access to information than ever before via a simple Google search and your website is your shop window to your services and builds your reputation.

A contributing factor to a positive experience is the ability to satisfy those all-important online search queries conducted by healthcare 'consumers' each day.

Does your website contain educational content that addresses the health consumer's symptoms and provides tips for preventative self-care?

Is your content jargon-free and genuinely helpful so that the consumer understands the potential options available to them?

It is also important to understand how patients' behaviour has changed over recent years. A few years ago, if a patient was referred by their GP, they would be very likely to accept that recommendation on face value and immediately book an appointment.

These days, most patients will 'validate' the recommendation before making a final decision to book. Their validation is likely to include a Google search to check the credentials of the proposed consultant, reviewing their website and other articles that appear online. They will be particularly interested in and impacted by feedback and testimonials by other patients.

Other contributing factors to your patients' first impressions include the ease of booking appointments, the person they speak to on the phone, the physical comfort while in your practice as well as meeting the patient's emotional needs.

Does the patient feel safe? Does the patient understand what procedures will be undertaken and why? Are the clinical teams consistently working together to support the patient's best outcome?

Ultimately, the fundamental aspect of your patient's experience is the outcome from the treatment you provide.

We are seeing The Private Healthcare Information Network takes a very proactive approach to providing patients with information on the performance and prices of hospitals and consultants.

Currently, patients can search by the operation they require to find hospitals and consultants who perform it. The information published is basic but undoubtedly will improve over time.

It is important for us to also accept that a patient view of the experience they receive will include the actual outcome and their perception of the outcome, which can be more complex to assess and manage.

So, we can see that understanding patient needs and how they are continuously evolving is crucial in optimising the patient experience and ultimately retaining a strong patient base.

Superior patient experience is both good for your patients and for your clinic/practice/business. When patients have a positive experience, not only are they more inclined to accept the recommended treatment but will trust you and recommend your services to friends and family.

The resulting outcome: happy, healthy patients equate to the success of your practice and positive financial returns.



Patient experience vs. patient satisfaction

It is a common mistake to confuse the true meaning of patient experience as opposed to patient satisfaction. Both measures are equally important, but the distinction is imperative to measure and deliver an accurate patient-centred care strategy taking both measurements into account.

“
A contributing factor to a positive experience is the ability to satisfy those all-important online search queries conducted by healthcare 'consumers' each day
”

Every patient has their own satisfaction or contentment level, making this measurement very subjective. While patient experience, on the other hand, is more objective and considers the sum of all interactions a patient has with the practice before, during and after care.



Steps to improve your patient experience

Delivering a good patient experience requires a very strong foundation across all aspects of your practice.

We will share some valuable insights here that will be explored in much greater detail in the coming months as we continue this series.

A good starting point to your patient experience strategy is to simply clarify your primary objectives and establish how you intend to achieve them, remembering that all objectives need to be achievable to avoid setting yourself up for failure.

A clear strategy will help improve patient satisfaction, increase patient loyalty, word-of-mouth referrals and ultimately increase revenue.

For many new practices, development
⇒ p22

oping a patient experience strategy and plan can often be challenging, particularly financially, as investment is required in terms of time and money.

It can also be a challenge for practices that grow quickly. Trying to manage growth and deliver good patient experience across all aspects of your service can feel exhausting.

Before you start actioning your strategy, ensure you have considered these all-important aspects:



“ Patient experience starts well before the patient decides to visit the practice. It begins when they first see your website, advert, leaflet or written content ”



Define your patient experience vision

A vision is a statement that encapsulates who you are and where you are heading as a practice, and your vision needs to be entirely patient-focused. The vision statement guides you in every decision you make.

Patient experience involves the organisation and its people delivering to the same set of objectives and values which are defined by your vision.

Your internal practice culture is crucial and each team member, whether patient-facing or back office, needs to deliver the standards set out in your strategy with passion and commitment.

The easiest way to define your practice vision is to create a set of statements that act as guiding principles.

These statements will help you to avoid losing sight of why your practice exists, what you believe in and stand for and the promises you make to your patients each day.

Understand who your patients are

Patients rely on you, whether you are advising them on preventive health or helping them through the most critical, difficult moments of their lives. Understanding their primary needs and wants helps you determine how to deliver the experience that they will value.

One way to make this easier is to create patient ‘personas’, which is a fictional person that stands as a typical representation of a group of patients with similarities.

For example, Helen is 45 years of age, an only child, single mum to six-year-old Jack and Molly who is two and suffers from recurring asthma attacks. She works part-time from home, allowing her greater flexibility around her young family.

Helen has recently started caring for her ageing parents, who are increasingly experiencing memory loss. She needs assistance in supporting her parents’ health needs, but is overwhelmed by the volume of information online and seeks for a simple way to understand the choices available to her.

By creating personas, you and your team can recognise and understand your patients better and map out the best way to provide care that will meet their needs in a manner that suits them.

“ By creating ‘personas’, you and your team can ... map out the best way to provide care that will meet their needs in a manner that suits them ”

Emotionally connect with your patients

Patient experience starts well before the patient decides to visit the practice. It begins when they first see your website, advert, leaflet or written content.

While they are researching the options available to them, patients seek to be emotionally captivated. You want them to say: ‘This doctor understands me’.

Patient experience is about the rational as well as the emotional experience. ‘It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it’.

Making an emotional connection with patients, whether it’s on the phone, through your website or your collateral information, makes patients feel understood, cared for and secure. The more connected a patient is, the more likely they are to become loyal advocates of your services.



Collecting feedback in real time

Patient feedback for most practices is about seeking feedback post-visit. There are many online survey tools you can use to make this an easier process for both you and

your patients rather than the more traditional printed survey.

Survey Monkey is a free online survey tool that you can use to capture the voices and opinions of your patients. For the more adventurous and tech-savvy practices, you may wish to integrate a live chat tool on your website.

This could involve your customer service team answering any queries in real time, directing patients to online resources and asking patients to rate their experience.

Ideally, patient experience should be measured for all interactions and not purely post-treatment. When a patient visits your website, reads an article, completes a form, we should seek to gather their feedback in real time.

There are several online tools that allow for instant feedback and rating that can be added to your website. For example, you could ask your visitors to rate whether the information they have read has been useful and, before they leave your website, you could also prompt them to sign up to your monthly newsletter. This is a great way of capturing their details and nurturing the relationship.

There are numerous ways to capture patient feedback and we will explore this in more detail in a later article.

“ The more connected a patient is, the more likely they are to become loyal advocates of your services ”



Involving your teams

Your team is the engine behind your success and every team member needs to be fully engaged in your patient experience strategy.

Encouraging your staff to share their ideas on how to improve the patient experience is vital to ensure they are engaged.

If possible, arrange a team meeting or workshop to discuss your strategy in full. If this is not possible due to time or geographical constraints, invite your team to contribute their ideas via an online questionnaire or individually by email for you to collate into a plan.

To prove that the ideas suggested by your team are valued, celebrate those ideas that get implemented. By nurturing and rewarding your practice team, you will help to keep them motivated.

A well thought-out and executed patient experience strategy provides an opportunity for differentiation, but it must be executed in a consistent, relevant and disciplined way by your team. Every team member has a role to play in delivering superior patient care.

“ Encouraging your staff to share their ideas on how to improve the patient experience is vital to ensure they are engaged ”

Measure, measure, measure

Measuring patient experience is as important as having a plan. The goals you set out as part of your strategy need to be continually assessed.

Many companies use the Net Promoter Score or NPS, which collects valuable information by asking a single straightforward question: ‘Would you recommend this practice to a friend or relative?’ Again, we will explore this in greater detail later.

Customer expectations are higher than ever before and will continue to increase and evolve.

Today, the patient is in charge more than ever and the doctors, clinics and hospitals that truly focus on the patient experience will deliver the most value for the patient and therefore create the most valuable health care businesses.

A solid foundation to your patient experience strategy will empower you with insight to meet patient needs; needs which are constantly evolving and require nurturing, care and review.

Patient-centric practices will see a positive impact on patient loyalty, retention and revenue growth.

In our next article, we will take a step-by-step approach to getting started with your patient experience strategy. ■

Jane Braithwaite (right) is managing director of Designated Medical, which offers business services for private consultants, including medical secretary support, book-keeping and digital marketing



MidexPRO 

Over 25 years of service excellence

The Cost Effective & Secure Private Practice Management System



- 24/7 online access on Mac OS and Windows
 - Real time backup on Microsoft Azure servers
 - Go paperless by typing & importing documents
 - One touch e-Billing
 - Encrypted software to ISO27001 standards & DSP Toolkit compliant
 - Outstanding UK Support via email, phone & live chat
 - Advanced analytical practice data available
 - SMS text reminders
 - **New:** Mobile optimised
 - **New:** Card payment processing
- Get in touch for a **FREE** 30 day trial of the system
- E: Support@midexpro.com**
T: 0330 999 3399
W: midexpro.com