

**September, 2010**

## **Making New Patients Feel Welcome**

First impressions count. What first impressions do new patients have when they come to your practice? It's an important question since patients who aren't made to feel welcome and valued when they arrive in your offices may decide not to return. Patients who are satisfied with every aspect of their appointment are more likely to remain loyal to your practice and to its staff. Here are some steps you can take to help new patients feel welcome.

### **The Appearance of Your Facility**

Take a critical look at your waiting rooms, exam rooms, and the staff areas that are visible to patients. Do they appear to be well maintained and uncluttered? Are the reading materials in your waiting room current? What type of first impression will a patient have of your exam rooms? New patients largely determine whether or not you run a professional operation based on their first impressions.

### **The Professionalism of Your Staff**

It can be extremely helpful to have new patients arrive 15 minutes before their first appointment for a brief orientation meeting. Train your staff to use this time to explain your practice's payment terms, appointment and cancellation requirements, and prescription refill/renewal policies. Consider giving new patients a practice information pamphlet at the end of this meeting. The pamphlet could include basic procedural information about your practice as well as contact information. The orientation meeting should be more than simply an opportunity to explain your practice's basic operating procedures to a new patient; it should also help your practice establish a solid relationship with that individual.

The attitude of your practice's staff is also important. Train them to give first-time callers details on what makes your practice unique. For example, if you have an in-office lab or offer evening or weekend hours, your staff should convey this information to first-time callers. In addition, your staff should work hard to maintain a caring and pleasant relationship with all patients, even the difficult ones. Patients who leave your office feeling that their needs have been met are more likely to return again and to recommend your practice to friends and family.