

Suggestions for Keeping on Schedule

- Type a list of several common procedures or services frequently performed in the office practice. Categorize each of them as follows: a. Time consuming services such as a complete physical. b. Services such as pap and pelvic exam. c. Brief services such as treating a routine cold, ear infection, etc. Then record the average time for each service.
- Give the receptionist a list of questions for patients so she can determine more precisely the amount of time to allocate for the appointment.
- See patients in the right sequence. Don't let early patients be seen before those who come on time. A scheduled patient should not wait over a walk-in unless it is an emergency. If any exception is made to this, advise the persons still waiting.
- Make telephone call backs at a specific time of each day.
- If physician is called away for an emergency, advise the waiting patients. Keep them informed of delays and offer to reschedule or have them return later. If the delay is expected to exceed an hour, have your assistant phone patients with later appointments and offer the same option.
- Leave some appointment times open for walk-ins, emergencies and referrals.
- Keep a list handy of patients who might be contacted quickly to replace no-shows or cancellations.
- The appointment book should have adequate space to write patient's full name, telephone number, date of birth and reason for visit.
- Avoid filling schedule too full on Mondays.
- Set a schedule for drug detail men to avoid disruption.
- During an appointment phone call, the receptionist should mention insurance plans the office accepts; if co-payments or deductible payments will be expected; as well as the general policy of payment at the time of service.
- Don't see patients twice. It's a waste of time to have patients ushered first into a consultation room for a chat and then sent to the examining room.
- Avoid taking calls during appointment hours. The assistant should explain: "The doctor's with a patient right now. If it's an emergency, I'll be glad to call him to the phone. Otherwise, I'll give him your message when he's free and I will call you back with a reply. If you'd rather speak to him personally, please tell me where you can be reached after office hours."
- Keep moving. To escape long-winded patients, instruct the assistant beforehand to interrupt physician after a certain lapse of time with a straight forward, "doctor, your next patient is waiting."

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