

Gauge your patients' satisfaction with regular surveys

Understanding how your patient feels physically is the most important part of any therapist's job. But getting a good feel for how that patient views your facility as a whole can be just as essential to maintaining a successful practice. Therapists should get a general idea of how patients feel about the facility from talking to them everyday, but performing regular patient satisfaction surveys can be just as vital, says **Michael Weinper, MPH, PT**, president of PTPN in Calabasas, CA. "We like to think we know what patients are thinking, but we never truly know unless we ask them."

PTPN, the nation's largest network of rehabilitation therapists in private practice, asks its facilities to perform patient satisfaction surveys at least once per year. This past year, PTPN facilities earned a composite satisfaction score of 95.4 out of 100, but Weinper says it's the negative scores that can be more important. "If you're a fairly successful facility, most of your scores should be high," he says. "That's why it's necessary to look at the individual surveys to find small complaints or any negative feedback."

Creating a survey

The most important part of the survey process is creating a useful survey, Weinper says. "You want to create a survey that gives you some sense of the encounter between the therapist and the patient."

Be careful of creating a survey with too many questions because it may "blur a patient's desire to complete the entire survey," Weinper says. A survey of no more than 10 questions can normally hold a patient's interest to fill out the entire form accurately and honestly.

You should also ask the patient to rank each item on the survey with no more than five options to avoid confusion. See p. 7 for a sample of the survey that PTPN providers give to their patients. Also ensure that the survey gives plenty of room for feedback and comments, Weinper says. "Your questions may not cover everything the patient encounters in the facility. His or her biggest gripe could [involve] the one thing you don't ask about."

For example, finding a parking spot may be difficult at your facility, but if you didn't include a question specifically about parking, you want to be sure the patient has a place to voice those concerns. Another item to consider is whether you want patients to put their names on the surveys. "I believe you want patients to have the option of putting their names on the survey," Weinper says. "Make it optional—but [understand that] it can be hard to address a problem if you don't know whose problem it is."

Knowing who filled out the survey allows your facility to thank the patient for taking the time to fill it out and address any positive or negative feedback individually. However, make it clear that filling in the name of the patient is optional because sometimes you get the best feedback from a patient who wouldn't normally criticize someone.

Issuing the survey

PTPN requires its facilities to have 25 patients complete the survey per year, but Weinper recommends that facilities issue surveys more regularly. "It doesn't hurt to have every patient fill out a survey midway through their treatment. Typically, these surveys are done at the end of a patient's treatment, but I believe that's the wrong time to do it because it doesn't give you the chance to mitigate the problem." Patients also may forget about the survey or lack the motivation to fill out the survey when they are finished with their treatment.

For facilities that treat patients who speak different languages, offering the surveys in the patients' native language can be helpful. For example, it's possible that Spanish-speaking patients may not fill out the forms in English and you could miss out on feedback from a specific population of your patients.

Tallying results

Although it may not be necessary to keep an actual score of your survey process as PTPN does, it is crucial to look for commonalities among your surveys. Find out if there is one particular area that always seems to score lower and then have staff look into

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that area. "Make negative feedback a group concern by bringing it up at staff meetings," Weinper says.

Weinper, because knowing your strengths and emphasizing those strengths to both payers and physicians can be just as useful as fixing problems you encounter. ■

Remember that any feedback is good feedback, adds

Sample PTPN patient satisfaction survey

Editor's note: This is an adapted version of the patient satisfaction survey that PTPN network distributes to all of its providers. Providers distribute it once per year to a sample set of patients. You may be able to use a similar survey in your facility.

Once per year we measure patient satisfaction within our clinic. The information you provide will be used to monitor and improve the quality of therapy services offered by us. We really appreciate your time and effort in helping us by completing this survey.

Please read each statement and check the response that most closely reflects your opinion. To maintain confidentiality, **once you have completed the survey, please fold in half, staple it with the stapler on the reception counter, and give it to the receptionist.** Thank you.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The clinic was neat and clean	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The front office staff was courteous and helpful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was able to schedule appointments at times that were convenient for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was seen within 15 minutes of my scheduled appointment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The therapy staff was professional and knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The therapists spent enough time with me and answered my questions in terms that I could understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was instructed in a thorough home program that I understood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I continue to perform my home program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The treatment I received from therapy was beneficial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would recommend this facility to friends or family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other comments: _____

Although it is not necessary to give us your name, it would be greatly appreciated. All information will be treated with confidentiality. Based on your response above, we may want to contact you. By writing your name below, you agree to allow our office to contact you.

(Please print)

Patient name: _____

Name of office: _____ Date: _____

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