

Building Patient Trust

You may be surprised or even shocked to know that many patients do not speak up about concerns they have regarding their care because they are afraid of staff retaliation. While you, as a professional, know this should not happen, this fear must be taken into consideration when interacting with patients. Consider the following tips for building patient-staff trust.

Be considerate.

- Acknowledge a patient's pain or discomfort.
- Apologize when you can tell that a needle stick caused the patient pain.
- Respond genuinely when a patient tells you that you have hurt them in the past.
- Speak the same language as the patient you are treating, even when addressing others.

Understand your patients' challenges in following their treatment plan.

- Expect and accept occasional failures; perfection is an ideal, not a reality.

Involve your patients and let them know they are a valued part of the team.

- Let them know that you want them to be a partner in their care.

Listen actively, compassionately, and completely.

- Allow a patient to express his or her concern without interrupting or reacting negatively.

Demonstrate that you care by creating a sense of inclusiveness and privacy.

- Sit down and speak to the patient at eye level.
- Whenever possible, pull your chair in close and speak softly to create a sense of privacy.

Talk to your patients and explain things.

- Let patients know what to expect by telling them what you are going to do before you do it.
- Ask permission to proceed and/or solicit feedback from the patient during treatment.

Remember, trust is not given; it is earned.

- Work at developing relationships with your patients.
- Mutual trust reduces fear and staff defensiveness.

Use patient mentors to help ease fearful patients' concerns.

- Ask patients who have utilized the internal grievance process to share their experiences.
- Urge fearful patients to work with a patient representative as an intermediary for grievances.

Show compassion by allowing the patient to express his or her emotions.

- Actively listen when patients need to vent their fear, anger, and/or frustration.
- Avoid trying to educate or problem-solve with someone who is upset; it's not the right time.

Try to provide different ways for patients to express their concerns.

- Provide an anonymous form or suggestion box.
- Offer an electronic process to express concerns.
- Provide patients with the Patient Grievance Toolkit: www.hsag.com/NW17GrievanceToolkit.