

## *The Mastery of Patient-Centered Practice*

### ***What is the one thing?***

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According to the renowned Nielson organization, as of June 2008 in the US, 72% of the population is using the Internet. In his excellent book, *Micro Trends*, Mark Penn states that the fastest growing trend in health care is "DIYD" (Do it yourself doctors). The last time you needed information, how did you search for it? I contend that patients have well formed opinions about chiropractic care. Their opinions may not be accurate, or necessarily represent the truth, however, they do in fact have them, whether they voice them initially or not. Face it, patients *Google*. They text, and collaborate. Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn allow for the concept of six degrees of separation to take on a whole new level and pace of connection. News travels fast. Two of the essential components of connecting with patients on day one, are; **establishing what their expectation truly is, and what they actually know about what you do.** Obtaining this information is essential to set the stage for communication going forward. Failure to ascertain expectation and the level and source of their understanding of chiropractic care will impede your ability to connect positively with them and endanger the development of your doctor-patient relationship. Without a solid doctor-patient relationship, you will have poor patient retention, and all the wonderful chiropractic science we can now bring to bear to help our fellow man is effectively, useless.

### ***What is... the one thing?***

You must first know the source of the new person who may choose to become your patient. Were they referred? Did they read about you on your website? Perhaps they read an ad, brochure, newsletter or flier? Did they learn about you from a less than direct source, perhaps from multiple acquaintances? Whatever the source of this new person, you must determine **the one thing** that motivated them to call and schedule. You must focus your inquiry, specifically.

For example your questions could be posed, "*What was the one thing your husband said that convinced you to call and schedule to see me?*" or "*What was the one thing you saw on my website that motivated you to call and schedule?*" "*What was the one thing you heard that led you to contact me regarding your problem?*"

The decision to phone and schedule is an emotional decision in every case. You must determine what motivated the patient to choose to call. The answer may be as simple as, "*I found you in my insurance book.*" Or "*My friend told me you were the best doctor she had ever met, and if anyone could help me you could.*" Another example might be "*When I saw your photo and read about you on your website, you sounded like someone who really cares about her patients.*"

Regardless the response, the information obtained is essential to understanding the *psyche* and *motivation* of your patient. You simply must know what the patient *feels*. You must know the emotion that spurred the patient's decision to choose *you* for care. This approach will allow you to frame your communication with each new person in a concise way; directed toward what is important to *them*. This protocol is consistent with essentially all the research on patient satisfaction. In other words, this practice is what patients expect from a thorough and understanding doctor.

Once you have fully fleshed out the answer to the "...*what was the one thing?*" question, it is time for a follow up question. "*What made you choose chiropractic care to try to relieve your [state specific pain or complaint here] pain?*" Or a variation, "*What do you anticipate chiropractic care can do for you?*" Still another, "*What do you know about what chiropractic care might do for your problem?*"

The person may respond, "*You are my last resort!*" or "*I saw a chiropractor in 1978, and he popped my back for me, and it has been great ever since!*" Still another example, "*I have a back problem, and you are a back doctor, so I came here.*"

If the answers to your follow up questions have a technical slant, it probably means the patient has been researching chiropractic on the Internet. But which sites? What is the source and extent of their knowledge? You must explore a line of questioning to determine what they are feeling and thinking about this decision to see you for chiropractic care. (As a side note I suggest you google; chiropractic, subluxation, chiropractic biophysics etc. and read the top 5 links of each search...the others are far less important. You should read and

understand the marketplace and what patients are exposed to regarding our profession.)

If the potential patient has had chiropractic care in the past, you must fully understand all aspects of their chiropractic experience before moving forward. They have a fully formed expectation, and you must know the full extent of their opinion to manage them effectively.

Regardless the answers to your questions the information obtained, *invaluable*. You must ascertain what the patient thinks about their problem, and how chiropractic intervention may be able to help them before progressing with your clinical examinations.

When you have fully explored these two questions, you have a reasonable grasp of the expectation and understanding of your new patient. It is a starting point you can build upon. You can begin to re-define or enhance their level of expectation and understanding as you progress with your history review, examination, radiographs and of course their presentation of findings. When you know the mind and emotions of each new person, you have the ability to connect with them in a sincere and meaningful way. You may be able to address any misinformation they have found as a "DIYD" on the Internet, and thereby provide them with the care they *want* initially, and as you build trust and earn their respect, the care they *need* in the future. As chiropractors, we do the best for our patients when the doctor-patient relationship provides care throughout the patient's life. To do so, we must first take simple, common sense steps. Define what patients feel, and whenever possible, ascertain the facts they used to substantiate their decision to seek your care. Respond accordingly, it is one critical step to establishing a life-long patient-doctor relationship and helping humanity with chiropractic care using the powerful science at our disposal to the fullest extent possible.