

The Qualifications of Quality - Part I

Greetings! The point I will be making in this series of newsletters is that any DC can become even more renowned, recognized, revered, and rewarded in their community through consistent public relation efforts and patient service.

Before we begin, recall that, in my most recent installment in the *ChiroThoughts* newsletter, we discussed and gave an action plan to better organize your thoughts and calendar for 2010. I do hope you have availed yourself to our complimentary *ChiroPractice Mentoring Planning Guide*. If you have not taken advantage of it, you can still do so by going to....info@chiropracticmentoring.com

This week's newsletter is Part I of a multiple part series on service quality. You may think to yourself "well, gee, Dr. Bowles, I think I do provide a great service to my community," and I would be in total agreement with you because I know you'd be thinking only of your clinical skills. DCs, like most other doctors, typically equate service quality only with what they do clinically with the patient. We rarely think about how things done clinically, and words said in that environment, are conveyed to the patient or the effects of having done a less than stellar job.

The question to ask yourself right now is this: How well do my patients enjoy the *entire experience* of their visits to my clinic? You might draw everything from a "heck....I don't know," to a "I don't see what that has to do with what I do." Regardless of which end of the spectrum you occupy, to be relatively unaware of how well your patients enjoy the *experience* will cost you in the areas of patient retention, referral and income.

What I will be focusing on in this installment of the *ChiroThoughts* series is the difference between technical quality and service quality. These two types of quality are indeed different and are intimately comingled while defining who you are in a community. Do NOT think that I will just blather on about a theory or concept; I will provide a suggested plan of action to show you what you can do to make your clinic a place where patients rave about not only the technical quality but also the service quality. Understanding the difference and improving your service quality will improve your bottom line financially in 2010.

This series will be presented in four distinct parts:

- 1) Medicine's profession-wide Service Quality
- 2) Chiropractics' profession-wide Service Quality
- 3) Basic Human Needs & Practice Building
- 4) Suggested Action Plan

Let's first take a look at how an MD discovered that there is a difference in technical quality and service quality during his own personal encounter with the machine of medicine.

Dr. John Kenagy is an MD and a Master of Public Administration (MPA) affiliated with the Harvard Business School and the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. In the February 17, 1999 issue of JAMA, he and two colleagues published a policy perspective on service quality in health care. If you read Dr. Kenagy's article, you will quickly see the relevancy of his thoughts for today's medical world and how certain features of the article can be applied to our profession of natural health. For instance, in the opening to his article, which was based on 1994 opinion polls, he states, "75% of Americans said that our health care system required

fundamental change, and 84% said there was a crisis in health care.” The current national discussion about health care reform shows that this information has stood the test of time.

Dr. Kenagy further comments that this erosion of confidence is due to “the poor quality of service in health care.” He believes that “we rely on technical results as evidence of high quality, but quality has another dimension, *service*.” Dr. Kenagy affirms that “promptly answering questions to the patient’s satisfaction in a clear, culturally relevant, easily understood manner is service quality,” and this must be done “in a fashion that the patient feels is timely, while helping to relieve the fear of pain.”

Technical quality is simply getting the job done right. In the chiropractic office, this means expertly producing radiographs that have been evaluated for pathology and abnormal biomechanics, a physical/ortho/neuro examination, adjustments, physical therapy, rehab, acupuncture, etcetera. Patients not only deserve this aspect of health care, it is expected. They place the same trust in us as they would the pilot flying an airliner, the banker keeping their money, or the accountant preparing their income tax return. Therefore, it is essential that the work is done correctly. Maintaining high technical quality of work is the key to that goal.

Americans are very tolerant of having mediocre *experiences* at those various entities as long as the plane lands safely, the money doesn’t disappear, they don’t get arrested for income tax evasion, and they return to normal function after seeing their DC, MD, DO, PT, or DDS. You may be thinking that these facts don’t apply but, if the additional component of service quality is added to technical quality, everybody wins. This goal can be achieved through “The 3 Rs”: retention, related services,

and referrals. This means that, in an office that has yet to begin to strive for service quality, the communication system is often one of rejection rather than consistent retention of patients causing profit to suffer and your personal stress to increase.

Patients that return to an office throughout their lifetime are referred to as “retained patients.” These satisfied patients are those that will send in friends and family to see *their* doctor. If you are wondering where to put more effort to generate new patients in 2010, patient referral is the answer. Most people trust the word and advice of a friend or family member over anything they read on the Internet or in the print media. Therefore, strong patient retention rates will likely result in new clients inquiring about what you can do for them after hearing such positive things from those that they know. So, if you have yet to see the bulk of your new patients with plenty of them coming from referral, your service quality may be what’s been lacking.

In our next *ChiroThoughts* newsletter, we’ll continue the discussion and begin to touch on the “How-To” of developing even greater service quality in your office to drive “The 3 Rs” even higher. If you’d like to speak with me personally about a specific situation you are having with your clinic, feel free to call me at the ChiroPractice Mentoring office anytime at 608.489.7542 extension 114. Until next week...