



Teri Robert

Patient Educator & Advocate, Author

RE: The hopes and needs of new patients

If you're reading this, one of your new patients came away from your office wanting to entrust you with their care, but having misgivings. The purpose of this letter is in no way meant to be critical. It's an attempt to offer some observations that can help you and our mutual patient have a successful ongoing doctor/patient relationship.

Most patients arrive in a physician's office better educated about their condition than the average patient. They have realized that you can't "make them better" or help them achieve better health by yourself. They agree with the statement: "Optimal health care is achieved only when doctor and patient work together as treatment partners."

Based on very successful doctor/patient relationships, I offer these observations for your consideration:

- The diagnoses, medications, tests, procedures, etc., of your practice have become very familiar to you and your staff. They may not be so to your patients, especially new patients. New patients may very well be understandably nervous and apprehensive, even frightened, about their health when they first come to your office. Much of what has become very familiar and run of the mill to you, is foreign to your new patients. If you and your staff keep that in mind, you can make the first visit to your office far easier for your patients.
- Taking a few seconds to establish a bit of personal contact with your patients can make a tremendous difference in the patient's comfort level. When you meet a new patient, could you please make contact by looking them directly in the eye, introducing yourself, and shaking their hand? That may seem a small issue to you, but to a new and perhaps frightened patient, it's no small issue at all. Please allow me to give you another example of why this can be important. I once had a first appointment with a new neurologist. After spending an hour with the nurse practitioner, the doctor came in, made some comments, signed some prescriptions, and left again. It wasn't until my second appointment, three months later, that I learned that doctor wasn't even the doctor I had been there to see. My doctor had been called away on an emergency. That incident demonstrated that the doctors in that practice had no respect for the patient and resulted in my seeking care elsewhere.
- If you were running behind schedule, simply saying something such as, "Sorry we're a bit behind today. Thanks for your patience," indicates to the patient that you place as much importance on their time as your own.
- We all understand that doctors are busy and have limited time to spend with each patient. However, asking your patient if they have any last questions for you can be critical to the doctor/patient relationship. Especially if you are turning the patient over to a nurse practitioner or another member of your staff and will not speak with them again before they leave your office, please take a minute to do that and tell them good-bye. Otherwise, they often think they'll see you again before they leave your office.

- If my patient has told you they want to be able to ask you questions about their condition and their care and/or that they want to be a partner in their treatment, and that is not acceptable to you, please tell them that right away so they don't waste your time or theirs, but have the opportunity to seek care elsewhere. Their wanting to ask questions and be a treatment partner in no way questions your expertise. It merely indicates a responsible patient. Such patients, generally are very compliant patients because they understand more about their care and the reasons behind your treatment plan.

All of the suggestions above are quite simple and take very little time. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and give consideration to these suggestions.

If you have any questions or need more information, please email me at teri@helpforheadaches.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Teri". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter being a large, stylized capital 'T'.

Teri Robert

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