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Customer Service

Folks, there's a reason why in survey after survey, moving is almost always at the top of the list as far as one of life's most stressful events. Whew! But the worst is over so now I can try to get back to work and pay for the new digs!

The Dallas Morning News, Sunday edition, had an article that gave me pause and made me look at a medical practice as a business. Let me explain. Said article talked about a renaissance of sorts in the profession that is now shifting our focus towards the customer service side of our practices. Examples of this "new look" medical office are accommodating patients at hours that are convenient to *them*, not the physician; leaving slots open so as to better accommodate same-day appointments. Other notables mentioned were the increased use of electronic

medical records to expedite prescriptions, faster turn around of calls made by patients, etc.

Well, DUH! What took us so long, you may ask? I can guess

as to why but that matters not- the fact is that we as

physicians are starting to get the message; we depend on the patient for our livelihood, ergo, let's make sure that patient is satisfied so they keep coming back! Simple business philosophy taught in customer retention 101, yet most of us apparently missed that class.

Tell me, why is it that when patients call and tell the receptionist/nurse/medical assistant that they are "sick"/vomiting/feverish/short of breath, etc., they are told that the earliest appointment is next week, Thursday - "is that OK, Mrs. Smith?" That scenario is out his/her philosophy and then make decisions based just not acceptable. No matter how you look at it, we're a service industry- if you're a patient that has an "just because". You have a choice. Use it in this most acute problem, you need to have the problem resolved- period. If your doctor can't accommodate you for whatever reason, viable alternatives need to

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be provided. If what I've described above is happening in your doctor's office, you may want to ask some pointed questions as to why. The same holds true with appointments at times that patients can make. The article specifically gives the

example of the small-town doc setting aside her lunch time for "later", so as to better accommodate her patients during those 30-60 minutes that they have available. How do you feel when you call up at 12:15 and hear a pre-recorded message that your doctors' office is closed until 1 or 1:30 pm. Isn't this precisely the time when you have to be back at your desk! There's **no reason**, IMHO, why there can't be someone answering phones during lunch hour to take on questions, make appointments, etc. Does your business shut down for an hour? Rhetorical question, I know.

There are other examples, but bottom line, as a whole, we need to do a better job at taking care of our patients- not in the clinical sense, I think we're pretty good at that. Rather, servicing our patient's needs so as to facilitate their care. Makes sense, doesn't it?

A disclaimer: despite my strong views on the subject, the above is not an indictment of practices that do not adhere to these "guidelines. OB's, for example, can't possibly follow the same schedule that internists do because of the nature of their practice. But do phones have to be shut down for an hour at lunch? You be the judge. All this article aims to do is to provoke thought, look into the established "norms" of typical, primary care medical practices and offer a glimpse into the inevitable future- that's good news to you, the prospective patient. Have a talk with your doctor; ask about customer service specifically. Hear on the answers you receive. Don't accept anything important part of your life- your health.

3211 Internet Blvd **Suite 280** Frisco, TX 75034

Phone: 469 633 9700 Fax: 469 633 9701

www.drcheco.com

