

## Healthcare Professionalism: How Important is Proper Bedside Manner?

Professional etiquette is one of the most important factors contributing to a successful healthcare career.

Healthcare involves many personal interactions with a variety of people. Etiquette in healthcare is more than just good manners; it is about establishing respectable relationships with patients, colleagues, and supervisors.

In a medical setting, healthcare professionals must set the tone for the interaction with patients and visitors. They are constantly in contact with people who will assess them based on the way they communicate, body language, and appearance.

“Healthcare professionals have a tremendous obligation,” says Dr. Robert J. Wolff, PhD, program director of Health Science at South University, Columbia. “The most important thing is that healthcare professionals have higher standards than most professions because they are dealing with the dignity of patients and their ability to be healed.”

Being kind and empathetic goes a long way in gaining a patient’s confidence. A visit to the doctor can be stressful enough without having to deal with unfriendly, inattentive, and disorganized medical staff.

Patient satisfaction can also be improved if patients are encouraged to express their ideas, concerns, and expectations.

“I think when the healthcare professional comes into the room, their goals should be multifaceted,” says Dr. Lila Stageberg, MD, assistant professor of Health Sciences at South University Online Programs. “Part of that agenda is to discover what the patient’s needs are. But, sometimes the most important thing is to just be present.”

## Patient-Centered Care

Patient expectations of healthcare experience vary widely, but for the most part people are seeking care that is patient-centered and meets their needs.

“Dealing with patients is a much more intimate experience,” Wolff says. “We are dealing with the aspects of healing, patient care, mental and social health.”

Service performance in healthcare is heavily scrutinized. It is critical for medical practices to focus on providing positive experiences for patients and caregivers that begins as soon as they enter the door. Everyone from the receptionist to the physician must do their part to convey a sense of courtesy, caring, and helpfulness.

Patients want to feel comfortable with the people with whom they are entrusting their well-being. Some communication techniques have proven to make people feel better and help them heal faster.

“Healthcare staff should be friendly and open. A patient should be acknowledged immediately,” Wolff says. “Smiling and appropriate touch also lets patients know they matter.”

A healthcare provider’s bedside manner encompasses their medical knowledge, personality, and ability to understand the patient and communicate their concern for them.

The most important thing is that healthcare professionals have higher standards than most professions because they are dealing with the dignity of patients and their ability to be healed.

Healthcare professionalism has become an area of focus on its own. San Diego, California-based medical marketing firm Sullivan Luallin Group created the C.L.E.A.R. protocol to provide healthcare professionals with guidance on the proper ways to deliver healthcare services. C.L.E.A.R., which stands for connect,

listen, explain, ask, and re-connect, encapsulates the important elements of service delivery and performance standards.

According to the Sullivan Luallin Group, service performance is as important as clinical performance; just as there are clinical guidelines, service protocols are necessary too.

“You have to define for physicians and staff members what job expectations are,” says Kevin Sullivan, owner and cofounder of Sullivan Luallin Group. “The behaviors we outline in C.L.E.A.R. are very simple, but people do not follow them because they are bogged down by the routine and repetition of their jobs. They do not know who will walk up next or what will hit their desks.”

## Interactive Health

The use of technology in the exam room has added another element to patient interaction.

In medical practice, healthcare professionals are using mobile phones and tablet computers to look up drug and treatment reference material, help choose treatment plans for patients, and help make diagnoses.

While these devices can be helpful for doctors and patients, they can become distractions that could potentially damage patient interaction. Although mobile technology and computers have become the norm in many medical facilities, healthcare professionals must keep their focus on the patient.

“The basic thing is the tablet or device should be used strictly for recording or seeking data,” Wolff says. “Always address the patient directly. Enter data and look back at them. The patient should be number one in that room.”

Patients using technology has also become an issue. Stageberg has noticed more patients using their mobile devices while they are hospitalized and looking for information on their own.

“What happens though is that people are not assertively asking their healthcare providers questions because they are trying to answer them on their own,” she says. “But, our purpose as healthcare providers is to be gatekeepers of the knowledge. We want to make sure the patient has all their questions answered, and they may not know what their questions are or should be.”

Healthcare will continue to face advancements and changes, but professionalism and a focus on patient satisfaction will continue to be at the heart of what it means to be in a healing profession.

## C.L.E.A.R. Healthcare Service Model

Sullivan Luallin Group outlines how healthcare professionals can appropriately deliver services. Here are some of the techniques in their C.L.E.A.R. service model:

### Connect

- Acknowledge immediately
- Establish eye contact and smile
- Use the patient’s name
- Use a friendly, helpful voice tone
- Say “please” and “thank you”

### Listen

- Maintain eye contact
- Be relaxed
- Don't interrupt
- Use "active" listening techniques
- Repeat information for accuracy

Explain

- Describe what's going to happen
- Answer questions with patience
- Let patients know about expected delays
- Speak slowly; repeat as necessary

Ask

- "Were all your questions answered?"
- "Is there anything else I can do...?"
- "Did you understand..."

Re-connect

- Check back frequently with waiting patients
- Direct patient where to go next
- End with a friendly parting comment

*Courtesy of Sullivan Luallin Group*