



Physician Patient Relationship Tool

Anxiety Reducing Handoffs: Continuity in Referrals between a Primary Care Physician and Another Provider

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Patients often find the referral process from your practice to another provider beyond your practice to be confusing and anxiety-provoking. Perhaps you're referring them to another provider outside of your practice, like a physical therapist or surgeon. Or you're arranging to send the patient from one level of care to another.

Patients wonder, who is this person? Will I be a stranger? Will I have to wait an eternity for an appointment? When the patient gets what they feel is a runaround from the office of the referral provider, they become frustrated, anxious and concerned about their health outcomes. The patient then either waits and worries or calls your office to ask you or your staff to pull strings to get an earlier appointment.

Consider two ways to ease the patient's way to the next provider and foster the feeling of continuity and seamless care.

- First, communicate to the patient your trust in the next provider. Help the patient and family to feel **SECURE** during the transition, clear about what's happening and confident about the person on the receiving end.
- Second, ease the patient's anxiety by reassuring the patient that you and the other provider *communicate* with each other. Patients become anxious when they are left to wonder if one hand knows what the other hand is doing. Also, since they trust you, confidence that you will stay in the loop reduces their anxiety.

Consider the following examples and then jot down words that are comfortable for you. The goal: To foster the feeling of continuity and seamless care with your patients *every time* you refer them to another provider. Try out these words and use them with your patients until you make them your habit.



Communications That Transfer the Patient's Trust

<p>Handoff to another physician to whom you are referring the patient</p>	<p><i>Mrs. Morrow, Dr. Myers is outstanding. Whenever I've sent one of my patients to him, he has treated them with extreme competence and caring. Also, he stays in close touch with me so I'll know what's happening at every step of your way...</i></p>
<p>Receiving a handoff from another physician</p>	<p><i>Mr. Harris, I see Dr. Richards is your family physician and he suggested that you see me. He and I work very well together and I can assure you I'll stay in close touch so Dr. Richards knows how you are progressing.</i></p>
<p>Handoff to an ancillary service</p>	<p><i>Mrs. Morrow, I'm suggesting that you go to the Community Imaging Center for the CAT Scan you need. Community Imaging has state-of-the-art equipment and a very caring staff. They'll take good care of you and they're also good about sharing your results with me as quickly as they can.</i></p>
<p>Handoff to Hospitalist (Provide a Fact Sheet about the Hospitalist role to patients and families too, since this role is new to so many patients.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"While you're in the hospital, I expect to visit with you once a day in the morning between ___ and ___.</i> • <i>I'm glad to say that this hospital has an excellent team of experienced physicians called hospitalists who will be responsible for your care during your hospital stay. Hospitalists specialize in caring for people while they're in the hospital. They check on you night and day and make sure you get the right care.</i> • <i>During your stay, other specialists might be consulted about their specialty, like heart or orthopedics. Hospitalists check on how you're doing OVERALL and identify the services you need from our whole hospital team.</i> • <i>Hospitalists are also my eyes and ears. I will stay in close touch with the Hospitalists caring for you, so we can work together when it comes to decisions about your care.</i> • <i>What questions do you have at this point?"</i>