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By Ana Kraševac Brink, Managing Director Service.LAB - <https://www.mysteryshopping.hr/>

Transforming Patient Experiences: How Mystery Shopping Unveils Hidden Opportunities in Private Clinics

Background

In 2017, we embarked on a mission to improve patient experience in private clinics. Over the years, we have discovered that while clinical expertise is essential, the overall patient journey - from the initial contact to the completion of treatment - plays a critical role in patient satisfaction and loyalty.

Since launching our mystery shopping program, the number of visits has steadily grown as clinics recognize the value of understanding their patient interactions on a deeper level. From phone calls to the reception desk, from nurse interactions to doctor consultations, our research has provided invaluable insights into areas of improvement.

Our Approach

Each mystery shopping visit is carefully structured to evaluate the entire patient journey, including some of the following points:

1. Phone Interaction

- Are calls answered promptly and professionally?
- Are staff knowledgeable about the clinic's services?
- Is information delivered clearly and in a friendly manner?
- Is the scheduling process efficient and convenient for the patient?

2. Reception Experience

- Are patients greeted warmly upon arrival?
- Are refreshments such as coffee or water offered at the reception area to create a welcoming atmosphere?

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- Is the receptionist well-informed about the clinic's services, including specialized treatments or medical products, such as dermatologic skincare?

3. Waiting Times

- How long do patients wait for their scheduled appointments to begin?
- Is the waiting area comfortable and equipped with amenities to improve the patient's experience?

4. Nurse Interaction

- Does the nurse provide empathetic care?
- Are patients adequately informed about procedures or tests?

5. Doctor Interaction

- Does the doctor ask enough questions, listen carefully to the patient's concerns, and provide clear, detailed explanations?
- Are consultations conducted with care and without being rushed?
- Is follow-up happening when needed, such as sending promised emails or providing additional information?

6. Add-On Sales

- Are the doctor or the staff suggesting additional treatments or services offered by the clinic?
- If applicable, is the clinic's skincare line recommended to patients as an add-on sale? Are patients encouraged to explore other available services that could enhance their care?

Key Findings and Results

Since 2017, mystery shopping in private clinics has revealed several actionable insights:

- **Phone Calls:** First impressions are vital. We found that clinics with clear and friendly phone interactions had higher appointment booking rates.

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- **Reception:** Small gestures, such as offering a drink at the reception area and ensuring the receptionist is knowledgeable about all clinic services, created a more welcoming and professional environment.
- **Waiting Times:** Long waiting times, particularly without proper communication from staff. We found that in many cases, patients were waiting 15 to 30 minutes past their scheduled time, which led to frustration and dissatisfaction. Clinics that reduced waiting times or managed patient expectations saw a marked improvement in feedback.
- **Doctors:** Early in our research, we discovered a recurring issue: many doctors were shortening 30-minute consultations to just 15-20 minutes. Patients not only felt unwelcome but also expressed frustration at having paid for a service that was not fully delivered. Doctors also missed the opportunity to ask the right questions or show genuine interest in their patients' concerns. This lack of empathy and attention during consultations led to a disconnect with patients, who felt that their individual needs were not fully addressed. By addressing this, clinics saw a significant improvement in patient satisfaction and retention.
- **Add-On Sales:** At the start of our research, we found that staff members rarely made recommendations for further treatments or promoted their medical products. This was a missed opportunity both to enhance patient care and increase revenue. By training staff to incorporate personalized and professional suggestions, such as recommending follow-up procedures or introducing skincare products at the reception or during consultations, clinics improved both patient outcomes and satisfaction.

Why Mystery Shopping Matters in Healthcare

Unlike many industries, healthcare experiences are deeply personal, and patients often come with high expectations. By objectively evaluating touchpoints throughout the patient journey, mystery shopping provides clinics with actionable insights that traditional feedback methods might miss.

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Clinics implementing changes based on mystery shopping insights experienced:

- Increased patient satisfaction and loyalty
- Enhanced team performance through targeted training
- Improved revenue through add-on sales and patient retention

Conclusion

Since 2017, our mystery shopping program for private clinics has helped healthcare providers refine their patient experience and elevate their standard of care. From ensuring receptionists are knowledgeable to addressing rushed doctor consultations, excessive waiting times, and improving add-on sales, these changes have led to measurable improvements in both patient satisfaction and business performance.

As competition grows in the private healthcare sector, the ability to deliver an exceptional, patient-centered experience will continue to be a defining factor for success. It is crucial to invest in customer experience and continuously conduct mystery shopping checks to ensure that the quality of service remains high and consistent.
