



A GUIDE TO PATIENT SATISFACTION TRENDS

What They Mean & How to Use Them

As you may have noticed, the term trend(s) is used in several of ABC's Performance Management standards. That's because trends are an important element in analyzing your patient satisfaction data to determine the strengths and weaknesses of your business and patient care services. But how exactly do you identify trends and what do you do with the information gleaned from your trends data?

LET'S START BY FIRST IDENTIFYING WHAT A TREND IS.

A trend is a general direction in which something is developing or changing (Google, 2014); like noticing that more and more of your patients are missing their appointments or that they are responding negatively to your satisfaction survey questions regarding communication. What could you infer from this information?

CONDUCTING A SURVEY

You are already required by ABC and CMS to conduct patient satisfaction surveys no matter the method, whether you use paper surveys with results you compile by hand or a third party software that helps compile the results for you, surveys are an important part of your accreditation compliance. But how do you go from a pile of data to clear solutions for your practice?

TREND ANALYSIS

The answer lies in the analysis. Trend analysis helps you understand how your business has performed and predict where current business operations and practices will take you. Done well, it can give you ideas about how you might change things to move your business in the right direction.

Let's take our example from above. Those two trends, one derived from daily operations and the other from your patient satisfaction surveys, have given you a picture – one that should set off a red flag. You may not be certain why the trend is occurring, so you may have to dig deeper. Your next step is to start asking more questions. Perhaps the person in charge of sending appointment reminders to patients is overwhelmed and forgetting to do so or the call system you have in place to make those reminders for you has not been set up correctly or is malfunctioning. Once you know the why, you can work on correcting the issue or helping to improve the situation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analyzing the data may be the most complex part of the survey process and perhaps the most overwhelming. If you or your office manager aren't the best at data analysis, you may end up with a stack of surveys and lots of results that don't give you a clear picture or help you improve. It's important to start small and get your staff involved. That may mean that you take a few of your survey results and present them at your next all staff meeting. Going over the results out loud may spark conversations and ideas to help you discover trends as a group. Someone on staff may even be able to shed some light on why these trends are occurring.

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

So now that you have a better idea of what a trend is and how to start analyzing it, let's take a look at some of the trends that might come out of your survey results and that your surveyor may be specifically looking for during your onsite survey.

Explaining financial responsibility at the patient's first visit



Patient calls being returned in a timely manner



Practitioner and staff answering all of the patient's questions



Practitioner informing the patient of the function, care, use, maintenance and precautions of their items



Scheduling follow-up appointments (if applicable)



Informing patients to call anytime if they have questions or issues rather than waiting until their next appointment

