



How to Write & Analyze a Patient Satisfaction Survey

Patient satisfaction surveys allow you to; improve how your practice delivers care, address any potential problem areas and establish benchmarks for customer service.

At a Glance

When writing a patient survey, consider the following:

- Determine the overall goal and how you will address patient feedback.
- Don't bombard patients with numerous surveys.
- Make sure the survey is available to everyone, offering it both via e-mail and a hard copy.
- Follow up on both low- and high-ranking scores.

Patient satisfaction surveys can do wonders for your business, allowing you to target problem areas, publicize and reward positive behaviors, and establish benchmarks for patient care. All of that is possible – that is, as long as patients actually fill them out.

That's where paying close attention to how your survey is written, and taking careful measures when it comes to analyzing the results, becomes very important. Without careful consideration to the approach, your results will be less than they could be. Luckily, a few easy tips can point you down the right patient satisfaction survey path.

Do Your Homework

Before writing the survey, doing a little homework can provide a solid foundation. First, establish the goals. What are you hoping to learn? Identifying ideal outcomes is the first step in knowing what questions to ask.

Rely on Past Experience

Leverage past experience – if surveys have been conducted in the past, use them as a starting place. Past surveys (or those of colleagues) can serve as excellent inspiration – and a welcome shortcut if you are short on time.

Target Questions to Areas of Concern

For the most part, pre-planning will help vital survey questions emerge. Even so, it's also worth tailoring questions to any known areas of concern.

Consider establishing core questions, such as:

- Staff is courteous and professional.
- Staff provides exceptional patient care.
- Staff provides quality orthoses or prostheses.
- Care was provided in a timely fashion.
- Desired outcomes were achieved in a satisfactory manner.

The best advice overall, though, is to keep it simple. People generally do not want to spend much time filling out surveys, so target the questions to gain the most value in the feedback.

Determine the Format

Just as important as the questions is the format in which they are presented. Survey experts recommend a combination of multiple-choice questions (i.e. rating scales) and open-ended questions that allow patients to write in their answers and/or provide additional comments or complaints.

The benefit of using numerical ratings is that you can measure your services and easily compare results year to year. That allows you to track improvements and other changes to your services.

Using a numerical scale also allows you to establish a norm, then you can track when you dip below it. Falling below the norm is a statistical indication of patient complaints that bears analysis and corrective action.

Make It Easy for the Patient

Perhaps the most important step in writing a patient satisfaction survey is making it user-friendly. After all, if a survey seems like a pain to complete, you're not likely to get many responses. And, while some feedback is better than none, this makes it difficult to establish reliable scores.

Keeping a survey short and easy to read is key. It's also important to allow anonymous submissions, although giving the respondent the opportunity to provide a name is important too, as it allows for follow-up.

It's also important to consider the audience and how the survey will be distributed. For instance, if respondents don't have ready access to a computer, an online survey won't yield much. Consider your patient base when deciding the medium of the survey. Offering a number of media helps boost your response.

If you are using an O&P software management program, most include a Patient Satisfaction Survey component. This will provide you with questions you can select from, the rating scale and the data collection tools. If you wish to use an online survey tool, such as SurveyMonkey, that program allows you to create, distribute and analyze your results electronically. You need to decide which method will provide you with the most responses; it might be a mix of the two formats.

We have provided a sample survey to give you an idea of the types of questions you should consider including in your survey.

Patient Satisfaction Survey Samples and Resources:

Link to PDF – Sample Patient Satisfaction Survey

[SurveyMonkey sample survey](#)

[Measuring Patient Satisfaction: How to Do It and Why to Bother](#)

Once Complete, Look for Trends

Once surveys have been completed, only half the work is done. That's because completed surveys are only as good as what you do with them. When it comes to analysis, look for trends, as these can point to potential flaws in the process, training or other changes needed in the organizational culture.

This again points to the value of using numeric scales, which make it easy to tabulate results and chart progress (or lack thereof). Tabulating results for online surveys can be even easier, as many services compile results in just a couple clicks.

Always Follow Up

While reliable and quite revealing, numbers don't always tell the whole story. Patients can. That's why it's important to take advantage of any follow-up opportunities available to gain additional information.

Once a problem has been verified, investigate further, internally, to learn what caused the problem and why it happened and then put procedures or practices in place to make sure it doesn't happen again. It is important to follow-up/respond to negative surveys to let the patient know that you read the survey and appreciate the feedback they provided. Also let them know what steps are being taken to address the problem they reported or to let them know the circumstances that caused the event to happen.

Contact the patient as soon as possible, with either news that you've addressed the problem or discuss with them the plan to make it better. Be sure to involve the patient in the solution to ensure they will be satisfied. And, you should consider a faceto-face visit with your patient if the complaint is significant enough.

Data Collection

Most of the O&P software management programs include a Patient Satisfaction Survey Data Collection component. If you are not using one of these programs, you can use the following example to create your own data tracking report.

Sample Survey Complaint Tracking Form

Patient Satisfaction Survey Complaint Tracking					
LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	ID#	SCORE	IMPROVEMENT NEEDED	PRACTITIONER
SMITH	JOHN	109	95	Waited too long for appointment	Mary Smith, CPO
WILSON	MARY	249	80	No education info provided	John Travis, CO
HALL	MIKE	222	60	Review complaint and call patient	Bruce Jones, CP

Follow Up With Staff, Too

Just as it's important to follow up with patients for more input, it's important to follow up with your staff, too.

When it comes to patient complaints or poor scores, involve your team. It may be helpful to establish ground rules so that staff do not get defensive when talking about negative patient feedback. Discuss the complaint (or low score) to discover the root cause. Address the cause immediately if possible. Or if it's a resource or policy issue that will take time, set up an action plan with dates and responsible staff.

Likewise, successes should be followed up on, too. Celebrating the positive behaviors patient surveys reveal can motivate staff to continue offering excellent service.

Share What You've Learned

Survey results aren't only of interest to you as the owner. Patients and staff alike will be interested in the outcome.

Consider posting all survey comments where your staff and patients can see them. If negative comments appear, list the corrective action as well. If you are transparent with your results, your patients will see that you take it (and them) seriously. You may even consider sharing the results in patient newsletters and on your website.

Marketing Your Results

Your patient satisfaction survey results can be one of your most powerful and least expensive marketing tools. Use your results in an annual report to all of your referral sources. Highlight the high response rate you've received (which hopefully you have) and the hopefully high level of satisfaction you enjoy with your patients.

Make the Time Investment

It's easy to say you value patients' input, but providing a patient satisfaction survey and demonstrating you've taken action based on the results shows them you truly do.

It does take time and effort away from your daily tasks, but it is always worth it. The time you devote to preventing and resolving issues will ensure greater mission support, satisfaction on both sides and cheerleaders for your business in your patients.

5 Tips for Patient Satisfaction Success

1. Always practice two-way communication with the patient.
2. Provide staff with regular customer-service training.
3. Strive for excellence in every interaction – from the way the phone is answered to the cleanliness of your exam rooms.
4. Always show respect for patients and make them feel important.
5. Show patients how much you value their business – not just in words, but in actions, too.

Survey Don'ts

While there are many survey do's, it's important to keep a few don'ts in mind, too:

- **Don't over-survey.** Bombarding patients with too many surveys can wear them out – and hurts response rate. One suggestion is to survey patients annually, and survey the same audience no more than twice per year.
- **Don't jump to conclusions.** When it comes to analyzing results, be sure to research all the factors that might cause them rather than making an assumption.
- **Don't operate in a vacuum.** To truly validate results, it's important not to analyze them alone. Instead, involve key staff in both the analysis and action planning.