

Kicking Butt

I knew I was in trouble within 60 seconds of meeting Patricia Raymond, MD FACP FACG, who specializes in colon screening (www.simplyscreening.com). That's all it took for me to realize that this is a woman with expertise at both ends of the alimentary canal! She is (in non-medical terms), a talker. By the time the second 60 seconds had passed, I was ready to sign up for a colonoscopy and stand in line for my "Butt Bag!" (We'll rummage through the Butt Bag later.)

Once I realized she wasn't going to hurt me, I wanted to find out why this so un-doctorly doctor had taken up medicine. A stand-up comic, I could understand; radio talk show host, if she didn't want to work quite as hard, sure; but stuck in a windowless room looking at the end where even beautiful people aren't that darned attractive? That- I had difficulty understanding.

Before I could ask, she started on the answer as if she had been asked the question a million times before.

"Customer service is lacking. Healthcare is one place where you can afford to be gracious... they are naked and you are not! So take the time, make the effort to win them over and make them a partner in the treatment and the experience."

"I decided right from the beginning that we would be different. If you call [our office], you know your call will be returned. And if you have to call a second time, you know we have failed."

"Customer Service (aka enjoying interacting with our patients, and providing results and discussion on a timely basis) is enjoying a resurgence amongst doctors who have artificially limited their practices, like me!

"Seventy to eighty hour workweeks were sucking the joy of medicine from me like The Alien in the Sigourney Weaver flicks. I elected to work part-time, and have subsequently opened a practice where customer service is KING because I, in fact, am the queen!

"We don't see patients as another pile of work and we hire staff that don't regard patients as annoyances. We don't hire drones; we hire passionate people who are passionate about life. They don't have to love medicine but they have to love something."

I wondered if there was a tough side to this doctor with a practice that, from my vantage point, looked a lot more like retirement than a serious medical practice handling serious medical conditions. Who wants to be elbow-deep in medical crises, teamed up with a doc who has a three-ring binder of butt jokes in her reception area? The short answer is "You do!"

Dr. Raymond is serious about both science and service, believing the two are inseparable.

"I will take the tough cases and the tough patients (and give them great service) but you cannot abuse the privilege." She adds, as if we were talking to Dr. Mom, "We treat you politely and expect the same."

It may seem contradictory that such an apostle of service would be, in her own words, "more likely to throw you off the island." And what an island it is!

The traditional idea of a waiting room was flushed right from the get-go. No waiting room; instead a reception area. You wait in waiting rooms; you are *welcomed* in a reception area. Same square footage, totally different experiences.

But what if they have to wait?

“We don’t intend for them to wait. Our reception area is usually near empty. Don’t tell me we don’t know how long a procedure should take! What do mean we can’t properly schedule...we’re doctors!”

So, there is a reception area where customers are welcomed, where there is a small library, a three-ring binder of butt jokes, and magazines that are current, where you are called on time, where if you wait, it is because you are early...and where the infamous frosted window left by a previous tenant is never closed!

“We don’t have any of that ‘take a seat’ stuff!”

She explains that old school attitudes cause us (doctors) to think we need to double and triple book, which leads to cattle-call crowded waiting rooms and patients to assume, “the Doc won’t mind if I cancel.. she has plenty of patients.”

“Doctors,” says Raymond, “have become too cavalier about patients’ time. Patients have gotten used to big words and little expectations. But treat them right, and your patients will fight for you to be on their insurance plan!”

Dr. Raymond seems to think that, “We (doctors) forgot why we came to medicine. Hey, it’s a relationship, and if you (the patient) are not compliant, you are gone!” Then she softens, and adds almost sheepishly, “It’s very uncommon for our patients to act out because we give them great service!”

The good service extends to staff. The practice was designed from the beginning to use electronics to insure efficiency and flexibility for both doctor and staff.

“If it’s flexible for me, it should be flexible for them.”

Staff can access the computers from outside the office. (That means HOME!) And office phone calls are easily redirected to home phones as well. (You’d like to work for Dr. Raymond- go ahead. Admit it!)

Oh, about that Butt Bag we mentioned earlier... In true Service Prescription style, departing patients are given a bag with a drawstring top, adorned with a cartoon and caption, “I have to take a peek!” Inside there is a ‘butt-on,’ a book of colon jokes, (appropriately), a moon pie, and a comment card.

Dr. Raymond adds, (as if we couldn’t guess)...“We get a lot of word of mouth! It’s easy to give good customer service when you love medicine!”

And that’s her story. Me? I think the woman is just plain anal attentive.