

# Chiropractic ECONOMICS

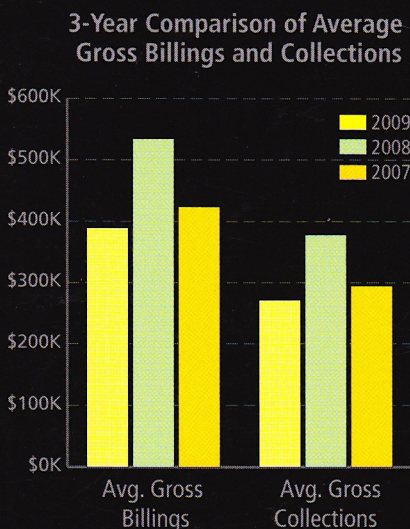
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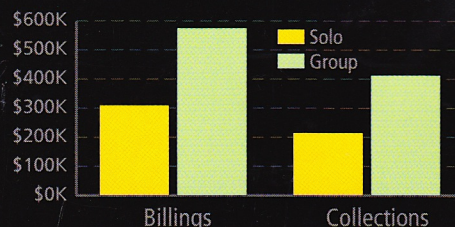
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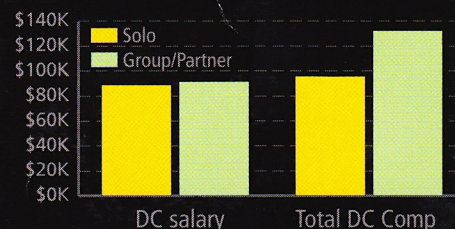
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# Tell it to me straight, Doc

## How to improve patient communications

By Monica Wofford, CSP

Communication is key — in fact, it's everything. So often, however, people are not taught how to do it well.

Most of your patients lack a chiropractic degree, yet some of you talk to them as if they speak the lingo of a veteran colleague.

You are so wrapped up in the day-to-day knowledge you use that you assume patients share this understanding. Or, you do not use the lingo, but fail to understand how your words land on others.

You want to tell it to them straight because it's not what you say, but how you say it — but exactly how do you say it?

How you communicate with patients will determine how well they understand the benefits of chiropractic, the

indicate a negative or closed thought process.

Much like this is not always true, there is very little in body language that is definitively one thing.

The key is to pay attention to changes, tension in the muscles, and indications that in context would give you the impression that the words are not aligned with thoughts.

When a patient says she's fine, but you can visibly see tension in the neck and the facial expression gives the impression that all is "not fine," pay attention.

*Note:* There is a distinct difference between paying attention and making notes, and prying.

**Rule #3: Note the tone.** Adults want you to "get them," but are not always comfortable telling you the truth or information that may create a conflict or disagreement.

*For example:* You tell a patient to sleep on a pillow they recently bought and when you ask how it went or if there were changes, they stammer and sputter and tell you in an

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## Communication is the most important element of relationship building.

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value of what you do, and how easily they can convey this to other potential patients.

Communication occurs whether you like it or not, and how you do it will vary based on your personality and style, but there are a few good rules to keep in mind.

**Rule #1: Ask for recall, confirm understanding.**

Anytime you ask someone if they understand, the automatic response will be yes — even if they weren't even sure you were talking to them.

Most people don't want to look silly, foolish, or as if they don't know. When you confirm whether or not they understood what you said, ask them to repeat or recall what you said and how they heard it.

Don't look for a carbon copy of what you said, but rather a confirmation that the message was heard.

**Rule #2: Watch body language.** Generations have been taught that arms crossed in front of one's body

all too enthusiastic response that the new pillow is great. It's as if they suddenly were promoted to head cheerleader and whipped pom-poms out from under the exam table.

This is an obvious exaggeration that, even if you weren't paying attention, could be spotted from across the office. However, the challenge in some communication encounters is that you are not always paying attention to the cues or how your words land on others.

**Rule #4: Keep personal professional.** When working in public service, or rather serving the public, there will be misunderstandings and misinterpretations and people who bring you their bad day. The key is to not take things personally.

Usually, those who make critical comments to you or about a staff member are sharing well-intentioned feedback in a less-than-friendly way. After all, if they didn't want you or the situation to improve, why would

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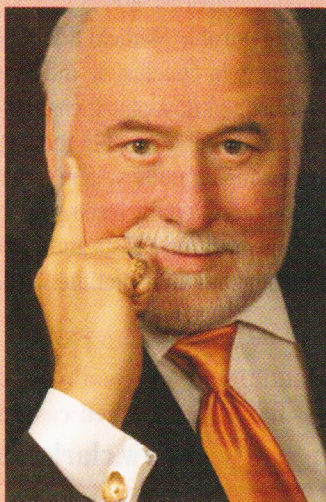
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they bother telling you how to make things better?

**Rule #5: Stress changes everything.** Anything you do well in normal circumstances can become a negative behavior when the stress hits the fan.

If you are normally a direct communicator who shares information in a “straight talk” format, this might become a dictatorial and controlling kind of communication when you are stressed.

Pay attention to your own stress level and remind yourself that delicate conversations might well wait to be had when the stress is less.

The same is true for your patients who arrive in an already stressed out state. They may not realize how they sound or what they are saying entirely, just as you don’t always realize the stress you are experiencing until it is incredibly obvious.

Communication is the most important element of relationship building.

Building relationships with your patients and having them understand the value of what you do and the care you provide are two elements that when combined will fill your office with loyal patients and revenue for years to come.

All it takes is dutiful attention paid to the art of communicating your intention.

It can be simple if you focus and, in this case, follow the straight talk, Doc. ☺



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