

Avoid Perfectionism

Emphasize Sensitive, Integrated Care

By **Ivonne Draughon, D.N.P., N.P.-C.**

“Perfectionism” – a word that has haunted us since we were children. It transformed the innocent and carefree into self-conscious, goal-driven adults. Most health care providers strive for constant self-improvement, enjoying activities like exercise and travel.

While perfectionism can have some obvious workplace benefits, this quality also can present some unexpected challenges when treating patients: Health care providers might find themselves wondering how they can gently encourage their patients to make difficult medical or behavioral changes without demanding the strictures of perfectionism in treatment plans.



The health care professional can better improve their patients’ health and self-image by being supportive and nurturing rather than depending solely on the strategy of perfectionism (even if that strategy is successful for the providers themselves).

Fortunately, there are many methods that physicians and nurse practitioners can

deploy in their pursuit of providing effective and cost-efficient health care. One major, positive trend is the industry’s general move toward integrated care, which emphasizes deep communication between providers and patients, as opposed to the “silo mentality,” which minimizes patient input. Under this integrated model, treatment decisions can be made based on a patient’s individual needs, expectations and capacities.

Another way providers can remove the “silo mentality” and shift toward integrative care is by cultivating positive self-images among patients. For example, overweight patients often feel unwelcome or embar-

rassed in medical settings and even face discrimination or, otherwise, negative attitudes. By making patients feel more welcome – something that can be done simply by smiling, engaging and being interested in them as people – doctors can go a long way toward improving their patients’ health care experiences and outcomes alike.

Doctors interested in encouraging patients

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to take their health care seriously should always be friendly, open and engaged. Eye contact and other nonverbal cues indicating that you are paying attention are important. Doctors should strive to radiate positive energy and good humor, heeding Hippocrates’s maxim from more than two millennia ago: “Where there is love of humanity, there will be love of the profession.”

Sensitive treatment of patients requires that providers attend to their personal needs for comfort, safety and positive reinforcement in primary care. This is particularly crucial for patients suffering from obesity. We must remember that the person, not the condition, should be the focus of treatment.

Any chronic health condition demands a productive, ongoing relationship between the patient and provider. By seeking input from patients on what works for them and what may be challenging for them in a treatment plan, doctors can at once make their patients feel valued as human beings and establish a treatment approach that works more effectively for the individual patient.