

# On a journey

Independent nurse prescriber **Julie Scott** discusses the patient journey

I have a confession to make: I have never had any training in customer service. I have had 14 years' experience working in the NHS treating patients for plastic and reconstructive surgery, I run my own clinic in Essex and see multiple patients a day, and I have been in the aesthetics industry for more than 25 years. But, like most who come from an aesthetic or medical background, I acquired interpersonal skills through interacting with patients over the years. These skills are important, but what I find the need to emphasise to fellow practitioners is that customer care is a whole different ballgame.

When I look back at the years of building my business Facial Aesthetics, I can confidently say the #1 contributing factor to my success has been my approach to customer care towards my patients. Not my training, not my prices, not even what my clinic looks like. I learned customer service from experience, and recognised the crucial role it plays in building my business. This is because when you build rapport with your clients and earn their trust, this results in the three Rs: revenue, retention, and reviews.

So whether you're an established and successful practice, or you're just getting off the ground and are looking for guidelines, it's always a great time to review your team's customer service skills at every touchpoint along the patient journey.

## 1. THE PATIENT JOURNEY STARTS ONLINE

Nowadays, we all know that patients have all the information in the world at their fingertips, and they use this information wisely. Before even picking up the phone to call your clinic, they will have found your website and used it to make a decision whether to contact you or not. Don't fall at the

The patient journey doesn't end when they walk out your door

first hurdle! You have seven seconds to make an impression with your website landing page before that potential client clicks the back button to go to the next Google result. To engage this would-be patient, it's important to give them what they are looking for first. I believe customer care starts online by making sure your contact information is easy to find, and trying to preempt possible questions by posting the answers in easy to find pages on your website. Also, something very important! but often forgotten:

make sure your online and social presence matches your in-clinic atmosphere. Don't overuse stock images – feature yourself and your staff. You are the heart and probably the face of your business, after all. Live up to the expectations you portray online.

## 2. THEN THEY PICK UP THE PHONE

Aesthetics is an industry most patients feel nervous about making first contact with. It often takes years for them to do their online research and talk themselves into it before they pick up the phone. So once they do, if it's your phone that rings, congratulations! They have chosen to invest time in you, so make sure that whether you, a member of your team, or an answerphone pick up, your patient feels instantly welcomed and helped. If they can't speak to you right away, make sure they have clear expectations of when they will hear from you. And of course, don't make promises you can't keep. Under promising and over delivering is the key to success, after all.

## 3. CROSSING YOUR THRESHOLD

Finally, the patient has reached your door. When you welcome them through, it can be so tempting to take the easy route into making money. By this, I mean up-selling, hard selling, or treating red-flag patients even when you know you shouldn't. It's so easy to do in this industry: pointing out problem areas, knowing you have the solution. And while using that approach may result in making money out of that patient once, it's far less likely to keep the patient coming back or referring their friends, which is ultimately what will generate the most revenue. My approach is to offer a complimentary consultation formatted as a relaxed discussion followed by a cooling-off period. It may seem counterintuitive to offer your time for free, but trust

that it's an investment in your patients, and therefore your business. It's important to guide and advise your patients, educating and addressing concerns without planting seeds or asking leading questions. My takeaways are to have a professional but positive outlook, educate your patients while presenting yourself on the same level as them, and create a safe, friendly, and welcoming clinic environment.

## 4. FOLLOWING UP

Of course, the patient journey doesn't end when they walk out your door. You want them to come back, don't you? Once they leave, giving them a quick call or email the next day is a great opportunity for after care. "How was everything, do you have any questions? Let's book you in for a follow up appointment." Keep your patients in the loop without spamming them, and remember details about them when they come back. Asking patients about the little details of their life that they mentioned last time when they come back to see you will go a long way. Build that rapport and trust with them, and they will turn into a loyal client that stays with you and your business for years!

The main thing to remember here is that the core of your business is your patient. Look after them. Of course it's important that you are a safe and skilled practitioner. Of course a proper marketing strategy will work wonders to bring patients to your door. Of course having awards and advertisements make you look more impressive. But patients expect all of this. What is most important is how you make your patient feel, because this alone will be the deciding factor on whether they spend their hard-earned money on your business or not. I'll leave you with one of my favourite quotes, which has formed the basis of how I treat all my patients and run my business: "They will forget what you said, they will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel." **AM**



**Julie Scott** has more than 25 years' experience in the fields of plastic surgery and skin rejuvenation. She is a member of the BACN and RGN having qualified as a plastic surgery nurse and nurse prescriber. Since 2003, Scott has been the clinical director of Facial Aesthetics, providing wide ranging therapeutic techniques for skin aging and dermatological skin conditions for clients across Essex.