

## What today's patients are looking for in a plastic surgeon

Gone are the days (if they ever existed) of plastic surgeons simply hanging out a shingle and awaiting clientele. With more competition than ever before, it's crucial to understand the perspectives, needs, and desires of the patients who find their way to your office. The good news is, the basic things patients expect—professional skill combined with personalized communication—remain unchanged, with a few modern-tech twists.

### **What patients want**

**Experience:** There's no substitute for skill, of course. And yet in 2016, people considering plastic surgery are seeking something more than just the usual "board certified" credentials. As we know all too well, patients aren't always aware of (or don't care about) the details regarding which accrediting body certifies what. What they care about is how many of the specific procedure they're seeking you have done and what, if anything, about your approach to this procedure has changed over time. Don't hesitate to share what you've learned through experience; honesty and openness are essential to building patient trust.

**Proof of results:** Before your patients put their trust in you, they put their trust in what others say about you. Providing patient satisfaction surveys is a great way to build your credibility and also provides you with the opportunity to constantly improve the patient experience at your facility. Consider adding a comments section to your blog or website, as well as links to online reviews of your practice. Consider collecting the articles and blog posts you have written into a book as proof of your expertise (along with plenty of new or revised information, of course!). If you are in a country where you are permitted to use patient testimonials or before-and-after photos of your work, it's a good idea to do so.

**Accessibility:** It's about much more than traditional office hours or answering services; today's plastic surgery patients expect to be able to get in touch with you 24/7. This is where having some social media savvy can come in handy. Patients can write posts on your professional Facebook page or message you privately. There's also Twitter, Instagram, blog comments, and the tried-and-true PHP email form that can be embedded directly on your website. Best of all, they're all free! Try to reply (or have your staff reply) to all serious questions and inquiries within 24 hours, and never more than 48.

**Relationship building:** It's not like hiring a lawyer or ordering a pizza. Patients are not only trying to select the right procedure(s), they're also deciding whether they want to commit their bodies and emotional well-being into your care. This is a highly personal decision that can't be based entirely on strong marketing materials or a single short consultation. Take time to demonstrate care, empathy, and active listening with each patient. Involve them in the process of explaining a procedure back to you after you've described it. Research shows that patients who feel comfortable with their doctors are more satisfied with their procedures and more likely to follow a prescribed post-treatment regimen.

**A comfortable, welcoming facility:** While cleanliness and safety are obviously of top importance, an inviting atmosphere is a close second. Lighting, furniture, décor, even aroma can all have a subtle yet instant impact on a patient's emotional response. Don't forget other elements of the visit that patients will encounter, which can include everything from ease of parking to a touch of potpourri in the restrooms.

**Friendly staff:** Of course, the patient experience isn't completely in your hands. From the person who answers the phone to the medical staff who will be involved in the procedure, every contact your patients have shapes their view of what you have to offer them. A cheerful and welcoming space starts with cheerful and welcoming people who listen carefully to patients and provide them with the guidance, information, and reassurance they need.

**Affordability:** Note that this does not necessarily mean the *lowest* price; rather, it's about offering financing plans and other payment options to help your patients afford their dreams. Patients also stress the importance of an all-inclusive price quote to help them determine their saving and spending plan. No one wants to be surprised with "extra" fees for anesthesia or facility use.

Every patient who walks into your practice is seeking something, even if they're not always sure exactly what. They're looking to you to meet them where they are and take them where they want to go. By anticipating their basic needs and concerns, you're reassuring them right away that they've come to the right place.