

## Managing the Referral Process Part 3

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**Growing Referrals and Patient Satisfaction**  
A Patient's Perspective

*Improve efficiency and productivity*

Referral Spot Light

### **Growing Referrals and Patient Satisfaction Takes More than Marketing**

#### **Why you should pay attention to the referral process**

Three important statements regarding the referral process:

1. "lost and unfulfilled referrals adversely affect patients by leading to larger health concerns and result in lost revenue for specialists (1)
2. "more than 100 million referrals are requested annually in the U.S., With **only half being completed** (2)
3. It is the responsibility of the referring clinician and the specialist to ensure "referrals are completed on time and meet the needs of the patient." (3)

This article deals with the referral process from **a patient's perspective**.

Can you answer these questions:

1. Does the referral process affect a patient's attitude?
2. Does attitude influence outcomes?
3. Does the referral process have an impact on patient retention?

### **1. Does the referral process affect a patient's attitude?**

The referral process can have a significant impact on a patient's attitude. They will feel confident about their care if the process is smooth and efficient.

#### **Some factors that can impact patient attitude include:**

- Wait time: Patients who wait a long time for a referral or to see the specialist may become anxious or frustrated.
- Communication: Lack of clear communication around the referral process makes a patient uncertain about what is happening and the quality of care.
- Empathy: Listening to a patient's concerns from the primary provider and specialist will make them feel more comfortable and confident in their care.

"Patients with a negative experience with the referral process were less satisfied with their care and more likely to have poor outcomes." This may be due to the impact of the referral process on patient attitude. (4)

### **2. Does attitude influence outcomes?**

Patients who have a positive attitude:

- Have better overall healthcare outcomes
- They are more likely to follow their treatment plans, which can lead to better outcomes.
- They are more likely to communicate openly, ask questions, and ensure they get the best care.

“Positive emotions can have a protective effect on health.” (5)

“Positive emotions may influence health outcomes, including physiological, behavioral, and cognitive mechanisms.” (6)

“Positive emotion may have a protective effect on health through a variety of mechanisms.” (7)

### **3. Does the referral process have an impact on patient retention?**

A smooth and efficient referral process can help build trust, strengthen patient relationships, and increase patient retention.

On the other hand:

- If a patient does not receive clear communication about the referral process or does not feel that their concerns are being heard, they may be less likely to return to the practice.
- Patients not satisfied with the quality of care they receive during the referral process may be less likely to return to the practice.
- If the primary care provider and specialist do not show empathy and do not address the patient's concerns, the patient may feel disrespected and be less likely to return to the practice.

A patient who has a negative experience with the referral process may be less likely to return to the practice for future care. (8)

**Manage the referral process and respect:**

- The value of time
- The importance of attitude
- The power of communication
- The significance of empathy

**Ask yourself these questions:**

- Can a slip of paper and a phone call manage the referral process?
- Can you provide secure, accurate, and adequate information with a slip of paper and a phone call?
- Can you track and manage referrals with a slip of paper and a phone call?
- Are you providing a patient your best service with a slip of paper and a phone call?
- Would you like to make it easy to share large files, secure, and conversational with information at your fingertips?

**Take a test drive on AwrelCONNECT to manage your referral process.**

AwrelCONNECT is one program that replaces several with:

- The efficiency of conversational HIPAA-compliant messaging
- Information continuity with large file transfer and storage
- Secure external guesting for secondary referrals

- Virtual assistants with AI

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(1) [Dentistryiq.com/practice-management/industry/article/16369779/study-nearly-half-of-referrals-made-to-dental-specialists-go-unfulfilled](https://dentistryiq.com/practice-management/industry/article/16369779/study-nearly-half-of-referrals-made-to-dental-specialists-go-unfulfilled)

(2) [Profsolutions.com/industries/dentists/insurance/risk-management/dentistry-and-the-referral-process/](https://profsolutions.com/industries/dentists/insurance/risk-management/dentistry-and-the-referral-process/)

(3) [NCBI.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3160594/](https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3160594/)

(4) "Patient Experiences with Referral Processes in Primary Care: A Systematic Review" by B.L. Jellema et al. (BMC Health Services Research, 2013) (4)

(5)"The Role of Positive effect in Health" by Barbara L. Fredrickson and Bethany A. Loscalzo (Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 2010)

(6)"The role of positive affect in health: An examination of the pathways and mechanisms underlying the influence of positive affect on health outcomes" by J. David Creswell, David M. Almeida, and Karen A. Matthews (Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 2017)

(7)"Positive emotion and health: Going beyond the negative" by Karen A. Matthews and Laura D. Kubzansky (Current Opinion in Psychology, 2016) -

(8)"Patient experiences with referral processes in primary care: a systematic review" by B.L. Jellema et al. (BMC Health Services Research, 2013)