



## Keeping Your Ear to the Customer

■ FRANK H. LEONE, MBA, MPH

**"**Keep your ear to the customer" is a central tenet of effective marketing. Awareness of how your services are used and valued can be especially important in a field like occupational medicine, where the people you treat are often not the ones who contract for those services.

There are many ways to keep your ear to the customer, and there are many customer subgroups. "Customers" might include patients, employers, carriers/payors, or specialists. Keeping close to these constituents invariably involves the use of multiple modalities such as e-mails, periodic phone calls, patient satisfaction instruments, and questionnaires.

### Why Assess?

Urgent care clinic operators often rely on intuition or anecdotal information to assess how their clinic is viewed in their community. Invariably, this information lags behind reality. You need to be proactive in seeking out real customer feedback. A simple questionnaire survey administered to a sample of patients and/or client companies can:

- tell you how well you are doing in a variety of service areas and turn up suggestions for improved performance.
- generate accolades that can later be used in marketing material and to enhance staff morale.
- provide you with cross-selling opportunities for other services
- help you identify (and rectify) areas in which your clinic is slipping and, conversely, provide objective validation of how a clinic has improved.

### How to Assess

While your survey should reflect your particular needs, following a few general rules may help ensure the effort is worth your while:

1. Do the survey annually.



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2. Keep it simple and short—one two-sided sheet of paper.
3. Allow participants to complete the questionnaire via hard copy (mail) or electronically via e-mail.
4. Send out a second questionnaire (and/or e-mail blast) to non-respondents after a few weeks.
5. Offer the chance to win a prize on the back end. It can be something simple, such as dinner for two at a local restaurant.
6. E-mail respondents with a "thank you" and a summary of selected findings.

### What to Assess

Ask participants:

- what they think of your clinic, and what you can do better
- if there are other valuable services you could offer
- if one or more of your staff warrant special praise
- about multiple aspects of your clinic using a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent)
- about their receptiveness to and the viability of any changes you've made in the clinic during the previous year; for example, a reconfigured waiting area
- about any other pressing issue of the moment, e.g., if and where to open another clinic.

### More Than Information

The value of a questionnaire survey goes beyond data.

Constituents appreciate being asked their opinion. It doesn't hurt to make that point in your cover letter and/or e-mail overview: "Because you are a valued Med Center client, we are deeply interested in your thoughts about and suggestions for our clinic...."

Marketing is about calling attention to your clinic and using multiple hits to remind clients, partial clients, and prospects that your clinic is alive and well and operating in a professional manner.

Conducting an annual questionnaire survey is not particularly time-consuming or expensive. It is an excellent way to stay in touch with your best customers or patients, learn more about the community's perception of your clinic, maintain an up-to-date information base, and remain visible.

If you would like to receive a sample survey questionnaire to see how these suggestions are carried out by, please e-mail Janelle Schueler at [jschueler@naohp.com](mailto:jschueler@naohp.com). ■