Communication is critical
Communication plays a critical role in creating a positive, successful and lasting impression on your patients. Communication is something that happens all day long and that takes place between all parties involved in your practice. While there are many opportunities to use exceptional communication each day, the single most important time in the patient cycle is the moment your front-desk phone rings with a new inquiry.

Create an impression of the doctor, the team and the practice’s quality of service begins to develop as soon as the line begins to ring. Even before the front-desk associate picks up the phone, the caller is forming an impression and working through the decision of whether to become a patient of the practice. The manner in which this call is handled is a true make-or-break moment. If this call isn’t handled in a way that’s professional, personal and positive, you have lost a new patient.

For the call to be exceptional:
- Answer the phone within three rings.
- Do not let the call be answered by voicemail. The purpose of voicemail is to collect calls and information while the office is closed. You and your staff should assume that every time the phone rings, a potential new patient is beginning to form an impression and work through the decision of whether to become a part of your practice family.
- Put out a guestbook for every guest — banding, birthday or graduation, or even “shopping” your business for the first time. Would you want to do business with a practice that has a posse of workers that play a guitar in the waiting area and fingerprints off the door or window?
- Develop and use a script for handling new inquiries so the call is professional and efficient. The goal is to invite the patient into the practice for a consultation.

Environment is essential
One way to realize the potential of increasing the level of service you provide is by looking at your practice through the eyes of a current patient, a potential patient or a parent. Act as if you are “shopping” your business for the first time. Would you want to do business here? Would you send your child to your practice if you didn’t work here?

It is easy to become complacent with day-to-day operations. You may not easily notice what could be done differently to grow, change and enhance your team’s performance. This is forming an impression and working through the decision of whether to become a part of your practice family and treat their families and network for exceptional. Your reception area is the first physical impression that patients will gather. As your patients walk into your office, what does your reception area say to them? Who does your reception area better suit — the team and the doctor? Does it better suit the patient, his younger sister and his mother? Be sure the reception area is as clean, organized and inviting as possible. Take pride in this area as you would in your own home. This area is where patients should be able to relax and feel comfortable while waiting for their appointments. Invite them to make themselves at home.

How to be exceptional
Consider the following to create a reception area that is exceptional:
- Offer beverages and treats.
- Offer free Wi-Fi access, and post signs to let people know about it.
- Market inter-office and community entertainment, education and events.
- Promote the businesses of patients and their families, and network for them.
- Offer open invitations and easy opportunities to gather referrals.
- Put out a guestbook for every guest or patient to sign or write in on every visit.
- Create a “Team Member of the Month” poster highlighting the member’s favorite movie, ice cream flavor, sport, vacation spot and so on to create a more personal connection between your team and your patients.
- As the doctor or practice owner, visit the reception area a few times daily to say hello to patients waiting, straighten the magazines and even clean smudges and fingerprints off the door or windows.

Service is significant
Being exceptional will separate your practice from the competition in your area. Remember, exceptionalities require going above and beyond normal operations. You should constantly be thinking of new ways to impress your patients and keep your operations fresh and innovative.

Most importantly, work a little bit harder than the office down the street.

How to be exceptional
- Write notes: Challenge yourself and your team to write one personal note to a patient daily or weekly. Don’t text or email but instead handwrite and mail a simple “Thank you.” “It was great to see you.” “Good luck this weekend at your soccer game” or another inspirational message to a patient.
- Make care calls: Take pride in your work, and take pride in your patients. Make personal confirmation calls, initial banding and debandings calls, “Thank you” calls to referral-makers and even calls just because. This gesture will speak volumes for what you do and the level of personal service and care you provide.
- Celebrate: Who doesn’t love a party? Celebrate every initial banding, debanding, birthday or graduation, or even celebrate just to celebrate! Realize that an exceptional experience is the deciding factor for patients to choose your practice, become a part of your practice family and bring other patients to you. The moment they decide to call your practice should set your own decision into motion.

Make the right decision. Decide to go above and beyond to impress that patient and decide to work a little bit harder and a little bit longer than the office down the street.

Decide to be exceptional.