

Tip of the Month



Fear Factor

Phlebotomy can be a numbers game; about drawing “x” number of tubes on “y” number patients in “z” number of minutes. But did you know that during every blood draw, your patients are doing arithmetic, too?

From the moment you introduce yourself and gather your supplies, your patients are gathering data about you and your technique. The manner in which you present yourself before, during, and after phlebotomy procedures helps determine a patient's Fear Factor. To calculate it, simply multiply the patient's apprehension about the procedure by the mental and physical variables that you, the collector, introduce into the equation. The higher the number, the higher the patient's level of anxiety. A patient's Fear Factor can range from zero to infinity, and beyond. To understand how this all adds up, do the math from the patient's perspective:

Failure to establish rapport. Although it only requires a fraction of the total time spent with the patient, failure to connect in a positive, reassuring way and remain focused will result in a negative impression and only multiply existing fears.

Problems with positioning. Patients who are drawn from precarious positions such as while standing up, or sitting upright on an exam table or stool may realize you're not counting on the possibility of them losing consciousness during or immediately after the procedure.

Subtracting safety. When you fail to assemble your supplies and put on a clean pair of gloves in view of your patient, you've just taken away the patient's perception of safety and added an element of doubt.

Miscalculations in technique. If you draw from unacceptable sites, blindly stick, excessively probe for a vein, ignore a forming hematoma or disregard shooting pain experienced by your patients, they may not know you are operating outside the standard of care for phlebotomy. But they will quickly figure out your technique does not compute, and that equals a loss of trust at best, and patient injury at worst.

Misgivings about mislabeling. Patients want to know that the specimen collected will be the one tested. Labeling specimens within sight of the patient plus having the patient verify the information where feasible, provides a measure of reassurance and eliminates mislabeling worries.

The solution? Instead of multiplying existing angst, make it your goal to lower the Fear Factor within each patient you encounter. Recognizing and reducing the variables that are within your control will earn you value and respect from your patients. It's a formula for success that will have your patients asking for you by name, to infinity, and beyond.