Don’t Blame The Patients For Long Wait Times

Chris Rangel, M.D.

Dr. Anthony Youn, a plastic surgeon practicing in Detroit places most of the blame [1] for long office waiting times at the feet of the patients themselves. He comes up with three general categories; patients who arrive late for their appointments, emergencies that require the physician to leave the office, and “oh by-the-way” scenarios:

“Here is a typical scenario: It’s the end of a 10-minute office visit, scheduled as a follow-up for high blood pressure. It’s been 12 minutes, the patient has her prescriptions, and the visit is concluding … The doctor begins to open the door and step out. ‘Oh, doctor, by the way, I forgot to tell you. I had chest pain last night and passed out in the bathtub. And I have bloody diarrhea.’”

Yes, patients can and do many wondrous things. If they did these things in a professional role we would call call their behavior negligent, manipulative, deceptive, non-compliant, selfish, entitled, in-denial, aggressive, and incompetent. But they’re not professionals. They are flawed humans in a very vulnerable and dependent situation in their lives. I don’t expect perfect behavior from my patients. Despite numerous appointment reminders and rules and requirements posted throughout the office there is a constant number who arrive late and forget to bring their medications. This is the nature of the game and is unlikely to change anytime soon.

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