

The Little Things (My European Latte)

By Tracy L. Drumm

In your practice, what do you provide that is above and beyond what the patient expects? I will illustrate my answer with a personal story.

I love Europe. Culture, history, and adventures are seemingly guaranteed and available on every corner. And so is caffeine -- coffee, lattes, cappuccinos and espressos are as ample as the majestic cathedrals. From one café to the next, you can spend all day sipping a cup of dark, creamy, or frothy heaven.

However, in spite of the velvety rich and enticing flavor of the coffee in Europe, taste is not solely why I cherish my abroad caffeine experiences. What I love and look forward to with child-like anticipation are the little extras that accompany each savory sip. From dainty cookies and fresh baked cakes to warm pastries and chocolate samples, your purchase is sure to be accompanied by something above and beyond what you ordered. Nestled snugly against the white, ceramic mug that holds your coffee, you will almost always find a delectable hidden treasure, an unexpected and pleasant surprise that greatly enhances my purchase. These extra touches elevate my 15-minute coffee break so drastically that I have returned to cafés just for those exceptional sweets accompanying my latte. I will even pay more for the service and coffee if I find the seemingly gratis snack particularly enjoyable.

Aesthetic medicine falls into a unique sector of health care that in many ways parallels the retail world. Standards of the purchasing industry warrant that you recognize patients are choosing to budget, save, and ultimately spend their hard earned dollars with you.

These days, it is safe to assume patients have less discretionary funds than in times past and are perhaps more frugal with their purchases. Combine that with the plethora of choices for providers that have sprouted over the past few years and it is apparent that providers now have to essentially compete for loyal patients. Little extras and inexpensive niceties go a long way to show patients you appreciate their time and investment into your business.

The good news is you don't have to break the bank to incorporate small touches that will make a big impact on your patient's experience. Detailed below are three initiatives that can be implemented right away to make a more welcoming office visit.

BASIC NEEDS

It's no secret that tending to a person's basic needs is an essential part to making them comfortable. A cup of coffee, tea, or refreshing glass of lemonade can calm pre-appointment nerves and help a patient relax. If possible, have refreshments available in your waiting room. An inexpensive water dispenser can be purchased for under \$30 at most home stores and creates a self-service station for patients.

To go the extra mile, have your staff cut a lemon, cucumber, or strawberries to add color and flavor to the water. For coffee and tea, take the pressure off of your staff to "serve" the patients by purchasing a Nespresso® or Keurig® single cup coffee and tea maker. This requires little maintenance and attention from your staff and offers patients a variety of fresh beverages.



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For practices that may not have space for a beverage area, consider creating a sign for check-in that says, "It's hot outside; please let me know if I can get you a glass of water or lemonade to cool down." Conversely, another sign for the winter months might say, "It's chilly outside; please let me know if I can get you a cup of coffee, cocoa, or tea."

CONCIERGE TRAY



Most high-end restaurants excel at ensuring patrons feel welcome and pampered throughout their dining experience. A luxury concept that can be borrowed from four-star dining establishments is to create a "con-cierge tray" that allows patients to quickly freshen up before leaving.

Set a monthly budget of \$50 for your office to replenish a tray that can include items such as hair spray, combs, perfume and lotion. Patients will now be ready to run back to work or out to lunch with ease after an appointment. A busy patient will remember and appreciate this time saving gesture.

Next on the list: have your office manager or esthetician stock up on necessary supplies you will need for the influx in appointments. Don't forget about ancillary items, such as ink cartridges, charts, and intake forms.

POSITIVE WITH A NEGATIVE

What is typically the last component to a patient's visit? Most practices will say the patient pays their bill. This is, however, a missed opportunity to reinforce the positive experience you have been working so hard to create. Don't let a patient's last interaction with you simply be giving up their hard-earned dollars.

At checkout, offer an indulgence or a small gift to sweeten the negative experience of swiping a credit card or writing a check. Cookies, inexpensive chocolates, or promotional items such as customized lip balms serve as a little extra that can transition receiving an invoice into a pleasant experience.



Just as the sweet pastries that accompanied my lattes overseas left me with a lasting and positive impression, small but inexpensive gestures will go a far at creating an unforgettable experience for your patients. By incorporating a few unexpected pleasantries into each visit, patients will seek and crave not only the way you make them look but the way you make them feel.

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