

15 Minutes

by
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All of us have probably heard a message like this at some time, "This is a reminder call that you have a doctor's appointment on Tuesday at 10am. Please arrive 15 minutes prior to your appointment."

Most of us have also signed a statement to the effect that if you do not cancel an appointment 24 hours before the appointed time, that you will be charged for the office visit.

Now this is a one-way street and should not be tolerated. It is understandable that for your very first visit to a doctor that you need to complete some paperwork and should arrive 15 minutes before the appointment time. It is also understandable that if you have new insurance cards and/or changes in contact information and/or other changes that you should again arrive early.

However what happens if you have to wait 15 minutes or more past your appointment time? Usually all you will get is a "sorry" statement and generally a shorter visit with your doctor.

Ideally if your doctor is running late, you should be informed immediately. Receptionists are aware of when appointment times are slipping to longer times.

The office and medical staff, including the doctor, need to understand that the patient's time is just as important as the doctor's time. They need to keep the patient informed if the appointment time is slipping, and they need to give a reasonable explanation as to why the patient has to wait longer.

While informing patients of the status of their appointment time is good customer relations, it is also a contractual obligation on the part of making sure that appointments are on time.

This is something that can be easily done but often ignored. So what can you do? If you have not seen the doctor within 15 minutes, you need to speak up. Keep in mind that, while you may be taken to an examination area, it does not preclude the 15 minutes. The 15 minutes applies in both the reception area and the examination area.

Another tack that some people have taken is to inform the doctor's office on their first visit that their time is valuable and that whenever they have an appointment they expect to be told if the doctor is behind schedule and by how much time. If they are not told and the person has to wait beyond 15 minutes, they then send a bill to the doctor for their wasted time.

None of the above however applies if you call the office and are told that you will have to be squeezed into the schedule. After all, you did not have a prior appointment and are being squeezed in as a courtesy.