**PHLEBOTOMY FOR ALL AGES**

Customer service is a key issue with many managed care and accreditation agencies (e.g. JCAHO). The clerical and phlebotomy staff are often the first people to have contact with the patient. First impressions count, and this encounter might set the stage for the patient’s opinion of your facility and services. When a phlebotomy is required there are some key patient issues to consider:

1. What are the specific fears of the patient?
2. How can I make the patient feel more comfortable based on these concerns and fears?
3. What type of behavior should I expect from this patient?

By learning about how people in different stages of development respond to others and their surrounding environment, we can better formulate and implement their care. The following guidelines can help a phlebotomist increase customer satisfaction in special age groups.

**Babies to 6 months**

Babies are not aware of what is going to happen – nor can you tell them. The parents, however, can be very nervous and apprehensive of the procedure. The phlebotomist should introduce him/herself to the parent and explain the procedure in a calm and confident manner. Allow the parent to hold the baby and keep them warm. Use a gentle approach and warm puncture site, if needed. Encourage the parent to touch and cuddle the baby during and after the procedure. Make sure to keep all supplies and discarded items out of the infant’s reach.

**6 to 12 months**

Children at this age usually have a fear of strangers. Although a child may not understand what you are saying – talk slowly and calmly to the child while maintaining eye contact. Keep the child on the parent’s lap or close to the parent. Warm puncture site, if needed. Encourage the parent to talk and comfort the child while the procedure is being performed. Children at this age may take comfort from a favorite toy, blanket or pacifier. Distraction techniques can also be used. Once again – keep all supplies and discarded items out of reach.

**1 to 3 years**

This age group already has a fear of injury or parental separation. The phlebotomist should introduce him/herself to both the patient and parent. The child may be able to understand the procedure that is about to be performed. Additionally, a parent may be able to explain the procedure in more familiar terms. The child will be able to understand simple commands at this age and may choose to cooperate. Take it slowly, do not rush. Children this age can be more difficult to hold still, however the parent should be able to manage it. Do not use excessive force to restrain the child. Comfort items or distraction techniques mentioned previously will help. Lots of praise should be offered after the procedure. A sticker or token reward can help.

**3 to 5 years**

Children of this age fear injury and separation from parents. If separation from parent is necessary, assure the child that the parent will return very shortly. Verbally prepare the child by explaining the procedure. Give them time to verbalize their fears. Children at this age are very curious so make sure all procedural items are out of reach. Child may pretend he or she is the doctor and may want to “help” with the procedure. If there is a clean safe item you can let the child examine, they may be fascinated with it. Encourage the parent to offer praise for bravery, thank the child and parent and offer a sticker or token as a reward.

**6 to 12 years**

Children in this age group are less dependent on their parents. You can talk and explain or demonstrate the procedure about to be performed. Take it slowly, allowing time for repeat questions. Be honest with when asked if will hurt but assure them it will be over quickly. Try not to embarrass the child. Involve them in the procedure. Children in this age group may be interested in “how” or “why”, explain why the blood is needed. Ask them if they want to sit or lay down. Keep the parent nearby. Thank them and tell them how well they did after the procedure.

**Teenagers**

Teenagers are more independent and embarrassed to show fear. They may act hostile to mask fear. Be sure to maintain privacy. Do not talk down; use adult language to thoroughly explain the procedure. Take extra time for explanations and/or preparation. Ask them if they have had the procedure before. If they have, ask how it went. This may give you a clue if fainting may be a problem. Ask if there is anything that might make them more comfortable. They may be curious about the procedure, so consider explaining what you are doing step by step. Answer questions about the procedure or equipment. If they have cried, give them time to recover afterwards. Thank them for their cooperation.

**Elderly**

Elderly patients may come to the office with fears of not understanding, not hearing well, expense of the services and outcome of the test results. The patient might have trouble simply getting from the waiting room to the phlebotomy area. The phlebotomist must be prepared for problems such as trouble making a fist or tremors. He or she should explain the procedure and possibly a reason why the test has been ordered. If the patient is visually impaired, speak normally and don’t shout. Speak directly to the person. If the patient is hearing impaired, speak at your normal rate, facing them. Never speak directly into the person’s ear and always include the person in all discussion about him/her. Time should be given to explain how they should fast or prepare for a specific test. Keep asking if they have any questions. Possibly give the patient written information. If eyesight is a problem, print the information in larger print. Ask them if they are comfortable and assure them it will be over quickly as possible. When selecting a phlebotomy site, avoid areas where rashes, scabies, edema and scaly skin are present. If any bruising is apparent, select a site that has none. Take care when applying and removing tape.