

Eli's Rehab Report

Reader Question: Don't Allow Anyone to Bully You

Question: Often, I find myself dealing with some really rude patients. Some bully me on the phone because they want to have something done on their behalf. Others are rude because they can't get an appointment when they want. How should I react to such pushy patients?

Answer: You as a therapist can diffuse angry or demanding patients by using some of the following methods:

Avoid becoming defensive. You do not want to become argumentative or cause a confrontation in the office or agency. Don't take their comments personally. Whatever was upsetting patients might have been just the last straw for them. They are probably stressed out or dealing with other problems that you are not aware of.

So, try to see the situation through their eyes, and recognize that they are probably truly upset about something else completely. Also, let them know that yelling or arguing will not solve the problem.

Listen and let them talk. You can accept blame without accepting responsibility. Use key phrases like, "I understand that you are frustrated" to show patients that you are paying attention. Also, respond and then be quiet. You will be amazed at the power of that pause.

Ask for clarification. If you don't understand, ask them to explain again. Repeat your understanding of the problem back to the patient so that everyone is clear on the situation.

Be polite and respectful. Many experts explain that you can kill a patient's bad attitude with kindness.

Be honest. Admit it if you can't help them instead of pretending that you can. Then try to find someone who can help.

Follow through. As with other types of emotional patients, follow through with anything you say you're going to do, from speaking with the billing department or calling them back to set up another appointment.