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DOES YOUR PRACTICE HAVE YOUR PATIENTS' BACK? WHAT SPINAL SURGERY PATIENTS LOOK FOR IN A SURGEON

Introduction

A patient needing spinal surgery is a stressful and scary time. It is no surprise, then, that patients shop around to find the right spine surgeon.

Materials and Methods

But what do they want? A survey was administered to a random cross-section of American adults to find out. Z-tests and Pearson's r correlations were analyzed.

Results

Among many other intriguing findings:

Respondents rated the importance of 24 factors on a 1 to 10 Likert-type scale. Eleven factors averaged above an 8 ($p < .0001$). Besides being board certified and experienced, patients strongly want a surgeon with whom they feel rapport. That data showed that one of the most powerful methods for creating rapport is for the surgeon to promise to "fight for" the patient to the patient's insurance company. Other critical factors were: being referred by a trusted source; having friendly and competent staff; using the latest technology; and being able to make appointments within a month.

The most trusted referrals come from primary care providers (selected by 30%) and family and friends (24%). If their primary care provider recommended a surgeon, patients were unlikely to choose a different surgeon ($p < .05$).

Specific types of patients want specific information: as one example, although research was not important generally, patients who prefer private surgical centers to hospitals strongly want to see lists of their surgeons' research publications ($r = .50$).

Discussion/Conclusion

This data clarifies what spine surgeons should emphasize in meetings and on their websites and what is irrelevant.