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Net Promoter Score Helps Quantify Practice Service Goals

When Oliver Lou, OD first heard about the Net Promoter Score (NPS), he thought it would be an excellent method to track and measure how good the patient experience in his Cedar Park, Texas Vision Source[®] office was. He had heard a presentation from Fred Reichheld, author of *The Ultimate Question 2.0*, and "it seemed like a simple and powerful way to measure how your practice is doing in a most important aspect," he says.

So Dr. Lou was happily surprised when he realized that Demandforce, with which he had been contracted for several years, would implement the NPS for his practice. And he was even more pleased that, since the NPS started appearing on the dashboard of his office computer daily, it has stayed level at around 95. The NPS shows a running 90-day look, and updates as new survey results come in. Patients who have a financial transaction with the practice receive a survey the next day after their visit. Among the general patient satisfaction survey questions is the NPS question: On a scale of 0-10, how likely are you to refer a friend to the practice?

Those who answer with a 9 or 10 are the practice promoters. Patients who answer with a 7 or 8 are neutral. However, patients who answer with a 0 through 6 rating are detractors and say they are unlikely to recommend your business. The percentage of detractors is subtracted from the percentage of promoters. Neutrals don't take away from your number, however, they don't add to it, either.

An NPS score works differently than an average. An average typically will result in a higher score. For example, let's say of 10 patients, 3 patients rate your practice a 6, 3 rate it an 8, and 4 rate it a 10. Using a simple average, your score is an 82. That's a B, not too bad. But in an NPS, there are 40 percent promoters and 30 percent detractors, leaving your score at 10. "Every low score wipes out one of your 9s or 10s," says Dr. Lou. "It really helps remind us that we're here to provide an excellent experience, not just an OK one. Only when it's an excellent experience will the patient be enthusiastic and loyal to the practice. It elevates the game."

Dr. Lou says he checks the updated NPS score about twice a week, although his office manager looks at it daily. "If we ever get a low score, we're already working on trying to fix it," he says.

To Dr. Lou, tracking the NPS serves as a way to confirm that the policies the practice has in place are patient-centric, not just developed for the convenience of staff and doctors. For example, he says, when patients call the office, the receptionist smiles when answering the phone. Callers can hear the friendlier tone. The receptionist ends the opening greeting by asking, "How may we provide you with exceptional service today?" It indicates that the practice isn't aiming for service simply to meet the patient's needs, but it sets the stage for exceptional service.

When patients walk in, there are 3 receptionists and 3 technicians who work at the front of the office. Seated between them is the office manager. "Having an office manager out front rather than in the back office helps us make sure that the level of service stays high. We can have confidence that patients' first impressions are good." Even the 3 doctors are known to come up front if the flow gets busy to help greet patients.

There's an emphasis on the patient's time that is acknowledged at every step. When patients enter, they're handed an iPad to complete their registration. The practice goal is to have patients checked in and with a technician within 2 to 5 minutes. "We have simple kitchen timers everywhere. As soon as the check-in is completed, the receptionist starts the timer, so the technician knows how long the patient has been waiting. Then the technician will start a timer when the patient is escorted into an exam room. Patients appreciate a short wait time," Dr. Lou says.

These timers also alert everyone on staff if a delay somewhere is keeping the patient waiting. Any wait of 15 minutes or longer typically triggers the doctor to offer the patient a gift card to Starbucks or Target, with an explanation of the wait. At several points in the process, patients will be offered a small token from the staff, too. That's as simple as keeping stocked candy dishes during certain holidays and a clean fully-stocked set of Keurig K-cups up front, as well as having a supply of customized notepads and pens. Patients waiting for the doctor are handed an iPad to pass the minutes until the doctor comes in. The office has fun toys for kids to take home, such as bouncy-ball eyeballs and customized penlights.



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Dr. Lou's practice has won multiple Best Optometrist awards from a local online publication.