

Self-Administered Liability Risk Assessment Tool

Practice Environment: Grounds, Reception Area & Facility

This survey tool is designed to help you to identify potential liability exposures within your practice and to educate you and your staff about systems that limit risk.

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| 1. Are parking facilities adequate, and do they include handicapped parking spaces close to the practice? | Yes | No |
| 2. Does exterior signage clearly indicate parking areas, handicapped parking and building accessibility, as well as the practice's entrances and exits? | Yes | No |
| 3. Are the parking lot and building free of potential hazards and adequately lighted? | Yes | No |
| 4. Is the practice accessible to disabled individuals? | Yes | No |
| 5. Is the reception area pleasantly decorated and comfortable? | Yes | No |
| 6. Does the office suite appear clean and uncluttered? | Yes | No |
| 7. Are up-to-date general-interest reading materials available? | Yes | No |
| 8. Is current patient medical education and/or health and wellness literature available? | Yes | No |
| 9. Are signs displayed in a professional manner? | Yes | No |
| 10. Is the reception area separated from, yet visible to, the receptionist? | Yes | No |
| 11. Does the receptionist greet patients courteously? | Yes | No |
| 12. Do staff members treat patients with courtesy and concern? | Yes | No |
| 13. Are staff conversations overheard by patients seated in the reception area? | Yes | No |
| 14. If a child's area is present, are toys and books clean and safe? | Yes | No |
| 15. Is a sound system present to support patient confidentiality? | Yes | No |
| 16. Is an area available where patients can disclose sensitive information? | Yes | No |
| 17. Are medications and drugs stored other than in an examination room? | Yes | No |
| 18. Are prescription pads inaccessible to patients? | Yes | No |
| 19. Are needles and syringes absent from all examination rooms? | Yes | No |

Please turn to the following pages for tips on practice environment management.

Self-Administered Liability Risk Assessment Recommendations

Practice Environment: Grounds, Reception Area & Facility

Seek to heighten your awareness of the physical office setting. Access is key to attracting new patients and retaining your present patient population. Safety measures contribute to a positive experience.

1. Parking and access to the practice impacts on the patient's experience and level of comfort. Parking, including designated handicapped spaces, should be as close and convenient to the practice's entrances and exits as reasonably possible.
2. Evaluate your practice for signage which identifies parking, handicapped parking and building accessibility, entrances and exits. Patients who have difficulty entering and departing from the practice may choose another physician or avoid making a return appointment.
3. Physicians should attempt to reduce the potential for physical injury from accidents. Consider participating in a walking inspection of the premises to identify potential hazards such as obstructed walkways, uneven surfaces, potholes or inadequate lighting.
4. The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) calls for businesses to make their facilities accessible to all people with disabilities. Adequate access for wheelchairs in exam rooms and other patient care needs should be considered. Safety bars in bathrooms or call lights are advised.
5. The appearance of your office is important in determining how a patient perceives you. Consider factors such as decor, furnishings, color and lighting, all of which influence the way the patient feels. Overstuffed furniture makes it difficult for patients to get up. Avoid furniture pieces which are straight or severe, and consider grouping furniture to make the office seem more inviting and comfortable. Provide adequate, comfortable seating. Large windows and pictures prevent feelings of claustrophobia. Neutral colors and indirect lighting are soothing.
6. Periodically inspect the office for appearance and cleanliness. The appearance of your office is important in determining how a patient perceives you. A messy, dingy or dirty reception area creates a negative impression of you and your practice methods. Provide open foot-traffic areas and unobstructed corridors. Consider whether exam rooms are well organized with adequate cabinets and shelves. In each exam room, an area should be available for patients to hang their clothing.
7. The variety and quality of reading material reflects on the practice. Control the quality of magazines you furnish for patients to read, and be diligent about discarding dated magazines. Be aware that popular magazines run features on physicians, and review the magazine before you put it out for patients to read. If you provide a TV, allow space for patients to sit out of direct hearing. Consider the use of patient education wellness videos or playing videos designed to soothe and relax.
8. Health, wellness and medical educational and informational materials available in your office setting promote and enhance patient learning and compliance, in addition to fostering your patient's health and well-being.
9. In keeping with providing a professional atmosphere in your practice, review the quality and quantity of signs you have displayed. Paper signs often detract from the professionalism of the practice. Consider placing paper signs in plastic holders or using a bulletin board to display an article. Periodically review posted material. Permanent signs should reflect the professionalism of your practice.

10. The receptionist should be able to view the entire patient waiting area at all times, as a patient may collapse and the event go unnoticed. The use of mirrors or reflectors may be required to keep the waiting room in view.
11. The first impression of your practice often begins with the receptionist. A courteous greeting with full eye contact and proper address of the patient's name speaks volumes about the way patients perceive your practice. Avoid the appearance of being rushed at the reception desk.
12. Assistants should understand the importance of good patient relations. Insist that each patient be treated courteously and with respect. Calling patients by their given name without permission is often distressing to patients, rather than endearing to them. Coach your staff to use listening, non-judgmental strategies to obtain information. Staff can encourage patients to participate fully in the physician/health care provider interview.
13. Do not expect patients to discuss personal matters at a window in a reception area that is open to other patients. Also do not expect that waiting patients do not overhear staff conversations that take place in corridors or in the clinical suite. A physical barrier such as a window is the best means to promote confidentiality. Yet be aware that windows are not soundproof, and patients seated near the window will overhear staff and telephone conversations. A professional decorum must be maintained by the staff as levity may produce stress in waiting patients.
14. Provide safe toys for children in the waiting room or exam room. Children often put toys in their mouths; toys should be large enough to prevent accidental swallowing. Avoid toys with sharp edges or those difficult to clean. Remember to inspect your premises for child safety considerations such as plugs for electrical outlets and electrical cord holders.
15. Consider the use of a sound system in your facility to support patients' rights to privacy and confidentiality. If your exam rooms do not lend themselves to privacy, music in the clinical suite may muffle conversations held in an exam room.
16. Provide a private area to hold conversations about patients' clinical or financial issues. Each office should have a private area where patients can offer personal information without the stress and concern of being overheard.
17. Store sample medications out of sight and never in examination rooms. Sample medications should be accessible only to those who dispense them or inspect them for expiration dates.
18. Store prescription pads on your person, in your office space or in a place where patients do not have access to them.
19. Syringes and needles should be secured out of reach and view of patients. If they are stored in an exam room, they should be placed in a locked cabinet.

Consider performing an overall review of your practice grounds and office suite on a regular basis as a means to identify unsafe conditions.



PLEASE NOTE: *These self assessments are educational only, intended to suggest steps that health care practitioners may take in connection with their ongoing efforts to promote patient safety and prevent medical injury. These recommendations are, however, subject to the professional judgment of the physician and other qualified professional personnel, who have the ultimate authority and responsibility in all matters of patient care. Medical Mutual Insurance Company of Maine does not warrant or represent that the practices it recommends reflect the prevailing standard of care, or that they will be found to comply with federal, state or local laws, regulations or other legal requirements.*