

# The Patient You Never Lost... Just Never Saw Again

*By Dr. Ray Foxworth, DC, FICC*

Years ago, I remember walking into the reception area between patients and asking one of my CAs about a woman who had come in for an exam the week before.

“Did she ever schedule her next visit?” I asked.

She looked down at the appointment book and shook her head.

“No, Dr. Foxworth. She said she’d call us.”

If you’ve been in practice very long, you already know how that story ends.

She never called.

What bothered me wasn’t that we had lost a patient. Every practice loses patients from time to time. What bothered me was that I honestly couldn’t figure out why. We’d done a thorough examination. I felt good about the Report of Findings. She seemed relieved to finally understand what was causing her problem. She thanked us on the way out the door.

By every measure I could see, everything had gone well.

And yet, she was gone.

Over the years, I’ve realized she wasn’t the only one.

Every chiropractor has patients who disappear after the first visit. They don’t complain. They don’t leave a bad review. They don’t ask for their records. They simply never come back. It’s easy to assume they decided chiropractic wasn’t for them, but after nearly four decades in practice, I don’t believe that’s usually the reason.

More often than not, something got lost between understanding why they needed care and believing they could actually move forward with it. That’s an important distinction because it changes where we should be looking for solutions.

## We’re All Chasing New Patients

Like most chiropractors, I’ve spent plenty of time thinking about practice growth. We attend seminars on marketing, invest in websites, encourage referrals, and look for ways to introduce more people to chiropractic. Those things matter.

But somewhere along the way, I started asking myself a different question.

What if the biggest opportunity for growth isn’t finding more new patients?

What if it's keeping more of the ones who have already trusted us enough to walk through the front door?

When a patient disappears after the first visit, we lose more than a scheduled appointment. We lose the opportunity to help someone who came to us looking for answers. That's the part that has always bothered me the most.

The question isn't simply, "*Why didn't they come back?*"

It's, "*What conversation didn't happen?*"

## Clinical Confidence Isn't Enough

As chiropractors, we spend years learning how to diagnose, adjust, and educate. We become comfortable explaining X-rays, reviewing examination findings, and laying out a treatment plan. That's our profession, and it's what we love to do.

Where many of us become uncomfortable is when the conversation shifts from clinical care to practical concerns.

How long will treatment take?

What happens if insurance doesn't cover everything?

What will today's visit cost?

What happens when benefits run out?

Patients don't ask these questions because they're trying to negotiate. They're asking because they're trying to decide whether they can realistically commit to improving their health.

Healthcare affordability continues to be one of the biggest concerns facing American families. According to recent surveys from KFF, nearly half of U.S. adults report difficulty affording healthcare, causing many to postpone or forgo recommended treatment altogether. Those financial pressures don't stop at the doors of our practices. They walk in with every new patient.

When those concerns aren't addressed openly, uncertainty usually wins. Patients don't always tell us they're worried. They simply don't schedule the next appointment.

## The Conversation That Changed My Thinking

One lesson I learned years ago is that patients don't just need a Clinical Report of Findings.

They need a Financial Report of Findings, too.

I don't mean a sales presentation. I mean an honest conversation.

Patients deserve to understand what you're recommending, why you're recommending it, what their financial responsibility is likely to be, and what options exist if insurance doesn't cover every service you recommend. None of those conversations should feel uncomfortable. In fact, I've found that patients are usually relieved when someone takes the time to explain everything before care begins.

When we avoid those conversations because we assume they're awkward, we often leave patients to fill in the blanks themselves. Unfortunately, patients usually imagine the worst.

Transparency builds trust. Patients don't expect chiropractic care to be free. They simply want to know what to expect before they commit to treatment. When they understand both the clinical recommendations and the financial expectations, they're far more likely to begin care with confidence and complete the care plan you've recommended.

## Your Front Desk Has More Influence Than You Think

One of the biggest lessons I learned as a practice owner is that patient retention isn't solely the doctor's responsibility.

It begins with the first phone call.

It continues at check-in.

It grows every time a patient interacts with your chiropractic assistant.

Every conversation either builds confidence or creates uncertainty.

Can your team explain financial policies consistently? Do they answer common questions with confidence? Do patients leave feeling informed instead of overwhelmed?

One confusing conversation at the front desk can undo an outstanding examination. On the other hand, one compassionate, well-trained CA can reassure a nervous patient who simply needs someone to slow down and explain what comes next.

That's why written systems matter. That's why team training matters. That's why consistency matters.

Patients don't expect perfection. They expect clarity.

## Don't Let Silence Become the Final Conversation

Here's something else I've learned.

Sometimes patients don't need a better adjustment.

Sometimes they need a better follow-up.

Life happens. Kids get sick. Work schedules change. Cars break down. Missing an appointment doesn't always mean a patient has decided to stop care.

I've seen practices reconnect with patients simply because someone picked up the phone.

Not to collect a balance.

Not to pressure them into scheduling.

Just to ask, "We noticed we missed you yesterday. Is everything okay?"

That simple phone call tells patients they matter.

People remember that.

## Confidence Is More Valuable Than Discounts

One thing I've learned over the years is that patients rarely leave my office saying, "I wish chiropractic cost less."

What they want is confidence.

Confidence that they're making the right decision for their health. Confidence that there won't be unexpected financial surprises. Confidence that someone has taken the time to explain the road ahead.

When patients have that confidence, the conversation changes. They stop asking, "How much does it cost?" and start asking, "When can we get started?"

That's why compliant financial systems matter. Rather than negotiating fees one patient at a time, practices should establish consistent financial policies that help patients access care while protecting the integrity of the practice. Programs like ChiroHealthUSA give chiropractors a structured, compliant way to make care more affordable without compromising the value of the services they provide.

Helping patients afford care should never require us to undervalue chiropractic.

## Sometimes the Patient Was Never Really Lost

I still think about that patient from years ago.

Maybe she found another chiropractor. Maybe her pain improved on its own. Maybe life simply got in the way.

I'll never know.

What I do know is that she taught me something I've carried with me ever since.

Patients don't always leave because they reject chiropractic. Sometimes they leave because we unintentionally leave questions unanswered.

As chiropractors, we're trained to diagnose, adjust, and educate. Those skills will always be at the heart of what we do. But today's patients need something else from us as well.

They need someone who can guide them through the financial realities of healthcare with the same confidence we use to explain their condition.

When we combine exceptional clinical care with clear, compassionate communication, something remarkable happens. Patients stop wondering whether they can continue care. They start looking forward to their next visit.

Sometimes the patient you thought you lost wasn't lost at all.

They were simply waiting for a better conversation.

## References

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