

### Tool 3. Signage

Do your patients feel welcome when they enter your clinic or hospital? Have you clearly identified where to go for assistance?

While some patients may feel anxious or intimidated when locating and entering a health care clinic or hospital, this may be more problematic for patients that are new to your clinic or hospital and for those with limited literacy. Creating a friendly environment that is easy to navigate may help your patients feel a sense of welcome and encourage their participation in the health care experience.

Evaluation:

- **Patient walkthrough:** Have a person who is unfamiliar with your clinic or hospital walk through it and give you feedback on the feel and navigation.
- **Staff walkthrough:** Have one or two staff members do a walkthrough of your clinic or hospital and assess the front desk area, waiting room, and signs.
- **Patient Registration:** Helpful atmosphere. First impressions count. The first person a patient meets in your clinic or hospital is very important at setting the tone. This person should be helpful and cheerful.
- **Help with forms:** If a patient is handed a form, offer them assistance filling out that form.
- **Waiting Room:**
  - Bulletin boards: These can be focal points of your lobby that arouse interest, stimulate thought, and encourage action.
    - Target audience: Your patient population.
    - Central theme: Have no more than four points of interest.
    - Easy-to-read and colorful.
    - Text on bulletin boards should be checked for readability level.
    - Update regularly: Assign different staff to maintain and update content on a regular basis.
  - Television: Many services are available to provide health information via a closed circuit television in your waiting room. When evaluating them, take note of any complicated medical terms or language that may be difficult to understand.
  - Signs. Making signs easy to read and clearly visible will help to avoid confusion and reduce the amount of time staff spend directing patients from place to place.

- **Identify locations:** Your clinic or hospital should have signs to identify or direct patients to each of the following areas:
  - From the front of the building to your clinic or hospital entrance.
  - Waiting room/Check-in/out.
  - Billing department.
  - Laboratory.
  - Nursing area or station.
  - Exam rooms.
  - Restrooms.
- **Identify process or procedure.** Your clinic or hospital should have a limited number of signs that give basic instructions such as “Please sign in” or “If you have been waiting more than 20 minutes, please tell the front desk staff.”
- **Use simple, universal words.** Make sure signs are in the languages of your patient population.
- **Use graphics when appropriate.**
- **Use color coding, lines, or symbols.** These may be another way for you to guide patients through your clinic or hospital.
- **Make signs clear and visible.** The signs should be easily visible by patients.