



## Chief Complaint – Why is the Patient Here Today?

### What is the Chief Complaint (CC)?

The CC is a brief statement that describes the symptom, problem, diagnosis, or other reason for the patient encounter. The CC is usually stated **in the patient's own words**: "I have an upset stomach, my knees ache, and I need refills on my pain pills."

### Why Do People Come to the Doctor's Office?

- A scheduled visit
- A new symptom, sign or test result
- A new concern about an old symptom
- At the urging of friends or family
- For administrative purposes
- Some or all of the above

**The Chief Complaint may not turn out to be the *real* reason** the patient came to the office. The patient told the receptionist that they just needed a follow-up for their diabetes, but you now learn that they really came in because of chest pain when they walk up the stairs.

### Why Don't Patients Always Share the *Real* Reason for the Visit?

- No one asked, or no one seemed interested
- Several problems, not just one
- Confused and/or depressed
- Embarrassed, afraid, distrustful  
or concerned about confidentiality
- Wanted to avoid the co-pay



### How Can We Help Patients Share the *Real* Reason for the Visit with Us?

Ask: "What brings you here today?" or "How can we help you today?"

Follow up with: "Are there any other things you need to discuss with the doctor today?"

Review the last progress note: "Looks like the doctor wanted to do an A1c today."

Too many issues?: "Which are the most important issues for you to deal with today?"

**You need to know the *real* reason for the visit in order to prepare the patient, the room, the other staff, and the provider for what needs to be done at this visit. A clear agenda saves everyone time and reduces frustration.**

*TIP*: As you type the CC into the patient's record, say it out loud to show your patient that you heard and understood the information they provided.