

So you are considering a career in the world of healthcare! Healthcare has countless opportunities available at many levels of education. It is a rewarding career with the chance to help people and work in a team environment.

For the past 17 years I have worked as a radiology technologist at a local hospital. Being in this field has given me the opportunity to work in xray, CT, mammography, surgery and teach radiology students. I take great satisfaction in making my patient's hospital experience as pleasant as possible – not always an easy feat! I have listed some of the qualities that are essential to providing good healthcare and that every healthcare employer looks for in their staff.

Good communication skills are a necessity in this field. Patients rely on us to inform them in a way they understand. This may include language barriers, education levels, age factors or the patient simply being scared of the unknown. The more comfortable our patients are, the easier it is for us to perform the exam thus resulting in good images and finally, an accurate diagnosis from the radiologist reading the images. A technologist must have the ability to speak to many different personalities – the scared patient, the anxious, the person in pain, the person who is running late for another appointment, and the person who is angry because they had to wait. You may have to alter your level of conversation with each patient you have – children, adults, non-English speaking, deaf or an elderly person scared and confused.

It is essential to speak in a clear, understandable manner and loudly enough to be heard.

There are many factors to communication:

- Age can present a communication challenge.
Small children should be spoken to in a calm gentle voice. The tone of your voice has a big affect on how a child perceives you. Use the child's name and the help of the parent to show you aren't a threat.
A teenager will want privacy and want to be treated like an adult. A female teenager doesn't want to be asked in front of her parent if there is any chance of pregnancy!
The elderly may have difficulty hearing and require you to speak loudly.
These are some of the challenges of communication with age.
- Language is any increasingly bigger barrier between 2 people. Often a patient may not speak English (and you don't speak their language!). In the healthcare field we are required to have a translator if there is a language barrier. Knowing if your patient has allergies, heart condition, or how they were injured is a necessity to accurate care.
- Culture plays a large role in communication. In some cultures don't look others directly into the eye or do not want to remove a piece of jewelry. While this seems like a inconvenience to the tech, it is increasingly expected for healthcare workers honor the cultural wishes of their patients. If a patient doesn't seem to be listening to the questions and instructions, it could be cultural or even the inability to hear. I need to be aware of the difference so my patient receives accurate quality care.

- Educational levels, handicaps, dementia all present communication difficulties. The goal is to provide information the patient understands without talking down to your patient. Just because Mrs. Smith doesn't remember her grandson's name, doesn't mean she can't hold her breath when asked.

When patients are in the hospital it usually isn't by choice. Often patients are scared, nervous, preoccupied, worried, thinking about the other tests they have to have, cost, etc. etc! Our job is to make sure, despite all of these other factors, they understand what will be happening and answer all of their questions.

Appearance is also important. As a healthcare worker we represent our hospital. We are expected to be clean, our clothes neat, name badge facing forward, hair pulled back and looking professional. If the staff looks unkempt, smells like cigarettes or too much perfume, slouches and is messy, what does this say about the hospital? We represent keeping people healthy and caring for their wellbeing. If we appear dirty and messy, it projects that image about our hospital.

When people are sick, the odors of bad breath, perfume, cigarettes or body odor can literally be nauseating.

Offering a smile goes along way with appearance also. It says "I enjoy my job, I want to be here and I'm happy to help you". Smiling allows others to approach you without apprehension and hesitation. Smiling can instantly remove stress from those around you and help put others at ease.

Compassion and empathy for patients is a must. Often I tell my students to think about how they would want themselves, their family or friends treated. It's the Golden Rule theory – treat others as you would want to be treated. Make sure you offer your patient privacy, a kind voice and clear instruction they can understand. Don't rush the elderly person with the walker because you are late for your lunch.

Remember often patients are scared, in pain or have many questions about the procedures they are having. Sometimes patients are too intimidated to ask for more explanation or help. It is our job to recognize these things and offer help.

Ask yourself this question: if someone looks lost, what do you do? Do you walk past and not make eye contact or do you stop and offer assistance? This may be a good indicator of whether the healthcare field is for you.

Reliability is a trait all employers want in their staff –regardless of the field! In the healthcare field punctuality and reliability are a necessity for everyone. Healthcare is a team effort. None of us can do our jobs well without each other. Doctors rely on us to perform the exam so they can read it and inform the patient's doctor of any problems. The phrase "only as strong as the weakest link" applies in the healthcare field. Anticipate being ready to work at the time you are scheduled, a minute late is late.

Coworkers rely on each other to evaluate their images properly, relieve each other for shifts, and pass along accurate patient information. We rely on a system of trust among each other.

Knowledge is ongoing in the radiology field. The radiology technologist program is a 2 year commitment. Potential students should be ready to focus on the academic and clinical portions equally. You will be expected to put the knowledge gained at the college to hands-on use at the hospital. The program is fast paced and challenging. The knowledge learned at the college doesn't stop after graduation. You must maintain continuing education throughout your career as a technologist in order to maintain your license.

But perhaps the most knowledge you gain is from fellow techs, nurses and doctors. On a daily basis I find myself learning something new from another tech (who learned it from another tech!). Knowledge and practical skills are something we proudly share in our field. The patient is truly the beneficiary. You can't be afraid to ask another tech how?, why?, can you help me?, what do you recommend ?, or how would you do this? Be prepared to pass along a helpful tip-don't hoard it!

Anyway we can produce a better image, make a patient more comfortable, expedite a procedure quicker or improve the patient's experience is worth sharing.

I hope this summary of skills has given you a better idea of the expectations of healthcare employers. We strive to provide a good experience for our patients and make the journey of healthcare easier and friendlier.