



VENA is here! By now you should have noticed a difference as you practice your newly enhanced VENA skills at your clinic. For example, everyone should seem happier and friendlier, and participants should be thrilled with the changes. But, if you haven't noticed a difference yet, read on to find out how your clinic can achieve the full benefits of VENA.

During training we discussed the WIC experience as being "value enhanced." We know how valuable WIC is to our participants. With VENA, we add personalized, goal-oriented service — we add the VENA touch — and that's WIC value, enhanced. That means the WIC experience is a positive one. We stop talking "at" the applicants, and start talking "with" them. We listen to what they have to say and respond accordingly. We don't treat the participants like numbers. We "value" each one.

How was their first contact?

VENA begins with the applicant's first contact. It may be in person, a call to the clinic, or a call to a call center. That first contact is our opportunity to show the applicant how much we appreciate her for seeking out our services. Greet her warmly, with a "how can I best help you" manner. Let her know that she has made a healthy choice for herself and her

family. The first impression is important to the WIC experience. VENA sets the standard for how the applicant is treated from the start.

How are participants treated on arrival?

Sit in the front lobby of your clinic, or a location where you can see the front desk, and watch what happens. When participants walk through the front door, someone at the front desk should automatically greet them and welcome them into the clinic with a smile. Courtesy includes prompt attention. When an applicant or participant needs something, it's important that someone at the front desk helps them in a timely manner.

Is the waiting area child friendly?

Many clinics arrange their waiting areas to accommodate small children. If your clinic doesn't have toys, books or other children's playthings, check with your director about getting some. Keeping children distracted helps keep the noise level down, and that makes parents more relaxed.

Do participants feel their information is treated confidentially?

A VENA clinic values privacy. If you need to discuss something with a participant in the front waiting area, do it quietly and with respect for their confidentiality. Your clinic should have a private place to take an



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applicant to get basic information. If you don't have them in place, make policies about what not to discuss in front of others.

What happens after initial screening?

After the initial screening, provide the participant with information on what happens next, instead of simply telling them to wait until someone comes to get them. Make sure the staff which gets income, residency and identification, tells the competent professional authority (CPA) of other relevant information such as the baby is not feeling well, or is hungry, or the mother has another appointment. Show each participant that their time is valued.

Does the CPA's office have toys or items to occupy children?

Parents who are trying to keep their child out of forbidden areas or from grabbing items off the desk, cannot be expected to focus on conversation. An occupied child means a more attentive and engaged parent. Making it easier for participants to concentrate makes their counseling session more valuable.

Does the participant have the opportunity to interact with the CPA?

Offer the participant the opportunity to tell the CPA what she is most interested in learning or getting help with during this visit.

The participant needs to feel WIC hears her and recognizes her as the “authority” on her own family. VENA teaches us to encourage participants to set personal goals to improve their family's health.

Did the participant enjoy the WIC experience?

End each encounter on a positive note. Thank the participant for coming and praise her for choosing WIC to ensure her family's healthy future. When the participant leaves with a positive feeling (“*Wow, they do care about me and the well-being of my family*” or “*Wow, WIC is interested in what matters to me*”) you'll know your newly enhanced VENA skills are working.

Are you and the participant getting the most out of the VENA experience?

To be most effective, the VENA philosophy needs to permeate the entire WIC experience. Enhancing the value of nutrition assessment involves all staff and the participant. The assessment begins with the first contact and evolves from there. The applicant provides us with only as much information as she is willing to reveal. If WIC treats her with dignity and respect from the first call, she will more than likely become a willing partner to improve her family's health.

Adapted from an article by Patti Fitch, RD of Texas WIC.

The WIC Works Resource System is a collaboration of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service and the National Agricultural Library's Food and Nutrition Information Center.

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