

INTERNAL MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM

Staff Notes

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDELINES TO ADDING 10 NEW PATIENTS A MONTH TO YOUR PRACTICE

Almost every practice feels they could use more new patients. And almost universally they say that the best new patient they can receive comes as a referral from a current patient. However, very few practices ever really sit down and systematically structure a comprehensive internal marketing program to encourage new patient referrals from their current patient base.

We have developed this guideline of tested techniques into an integrated internal marketing program. Many of the individual elements have been contributed by our client practices, others have been borrowed from the best practice management advisors in the country. We have refined and combined these with our own unique approach to develop a very powerful method for systematically acquiring new patients.

This program includes a combination of simple verbal skills, business cards/Smile Cards, patient letters, and patient thank-you gifts. While you may modify any element to meet your specific situation, the best results generally come from implementing the program exactly as we have laid it out.

PHASE I: THE NUMBER ONE WAY TO ACQUIRE A NEW PATIENT

Suzanne and I have been teaching this technique in our seminars for more than eight years. It is so simple and cost effective that it never ceases to amaze us how few practices implement the procedure.

The bottom line is very simple. Ask your current patients to refer other patients. We know that for some of you, asking for referrals is extremely difficult. You may even feel it denigrates your professional image. This is simply not true. It is easy to do and it can immeasurably increase your professional image and standing with the patient.

Step 1. Analyze this simple statement

Staff Member: *"Mrs. Jones, I would like to thank you. I wish all of our patients were as nice as you. If you have any friends or family who are like you, please don't hesitate to send them to us. We will be sure to take good care of them."*

Let's break the statement down phrase by phrase:

"Mrs. Jones, I would like to thank you."

Address the patient by name. Thanking them gets their attention. They want to know why.

"I wish all of our patients were as nice as you."

You have complimented the patient. Every patient likes to be complimented, even if it is blatant or outrageous flattery.

"If you have any friends or family who are like you,"

"Friends" or "family" identifies the category of person you want them to refer. "Like you" is both a compliment and tells the patient you are interested only in "nice" people like themselves.

"please don't hesitate to send them to us."

This is the most important part. You are asking for the referral - "send them to us."

"We will be sure to take good care of them."

This reassures the patient that their referral will be well treated by the doctor and staff. And their good treatment will reflect on them.

Let's take the conversation one step further:

Staff Member: *"Mrs. Jones, I would like to thank you. I wish all of our patients were as nice as you. If you have any friends or family who are like you, please don't hesitate to send them to us. We will be sure to take good care of them."*

Mrs. Jones: *"Why, Mary, I didn't know you were accepting new patients!"*

Most people are amazed when a patient responds like this, but it is not an uncommon situation. First you must understand that many of your patients probably think your practice is closed to new people. Each time they come in they see all the other patients and a busy staff and they assume you have all the patients you can handle.

Your response is simple:

Staff Member: *"Well, each year a number of patients move out of the area and we like to replace them with quality referrals from our best patients."*

Statistically, 20% of the population moves each year. This means you lose 1 out of 5 patients each year. It makes it obvious to the patient that you need to replace patients who move with new *"quality referrals"* while you compliment them again, *"from our best patients."*

Let's review the total pattern once again with one last touch:

Staff Member: *"Mrs. Jones, I would like to thank you. I wish all of our patients were as nice as you. If you have any friends or family who are like you, please don't hesitate to send them to us. We will be sure to take good care of them."*

Mrs. Jones: *"Why, Mary, I didn't know you were accepting new patients!"*

Staff Member: *"Well, each year a number of patients move out of the area and we like to replace them with quality referrals from our best patients."*

"And Mrs. Jones, please be sure to have them mention your name when they call so we can thank you personally."

Since you already automatically ask and note the source of each new patient, the operative words here are *"so we can thank you personally."* Everyone likes to be thanked when they do a favor for someone else. Plus, as we move through this integrated strategy, you will see that how we thank referrers is extremely important.

Step 2. Staff training

To be successful, not only the doctor, but each staff member must be trained in asking patients for referrals. The doctor may not always be available, so it is required that all staff members feel comfortable and be prepared to ask for the referral. Follow these steps:

- A. Have everyone, starting with the doctor, take turns reading out loud the verbiage for asking for a referral. This may seem boring and repetitious. However, the more you hear the phrasing, the more comfortable you will feel with it.
- B. Next analyze the structure of the phrasings. Take the time to understand the purpose of every aspect of the different elements. Open this part of the process up to the group for discussion.

If you like, restructure the phrasing in words you feel more comfortable with. Do this yourself now. It will demonstrate to the rest of the staff how important this really is.

Use the format below:

Staff Member: *"Mrs. Jones, I would like to thank you. I wish all of our patients were as nice as you. If you have any friends or family who are like you, please don't hesitate to send them to us. We will be sure to take good care of them."*

Mrs. Jones: *"Why, Mary, I didn't know you were accepting new patients!"*

Staff Member: *"Well, each year a number of patients move out of the area and we like to replace them with quality referrals from our best patients."*

"And Mrs. Jones, please be sure to have them mention your name when they call so we can thank you personally."

- C. Now comes the fun part. Break into teams of two. Have each team role-play the dialogue. One staff member is the patient. The other is the person asking for the referral. Each team member must do each part at least two (2) times.
- D. Switch team members and repeat the role-playing process. Each team member must do each part at least two (2) times again.
- E. For the final test, each staff member must role-play the referral with the doctor playing the part of the patient.
- F. By now everyone should have become comfortable with the process of asking for patient referrals. The key to ultimate success is to repeat Step E in your next two (2) staff meetings. It will only take five (5) minutes and it will reinforce the skill in your mind.

Step 3. Who should ask for the referral?

Every management consultant from the time of Adam has advised professional practices to hold a 5-minute morning meeting with all staff members to review the day's patients. As part of this meeting, note those patients who are completing treatment, both dental and hygiene, and assign a staff member to ask for the referral.

Choose the staff member who has the best rapport with that particular patient. That person is then assigned to ask for the referral. Try as best you can to spread these assignments among the different staff members and the doctor.

If you should have a patient with whom no one has a rapport, the lead must be taken by the doctor. The important thing is to avoid having two or three staff members asking the same patient for referrals.

The key to the whole process is to
systematize asking for referrals
starting every morning with the morning meeting.

And Remember....

If you don't _____ you don't _____.