

Increase Your “PPO Volume” through Tasteful, Effective Marketing

by Marc Aronson

If you are a primary care physician or medical specialist and your practice provides superior patient relations in comparison to other local medical practices within your specialty, you will more easily retain your patient base and maximize patient referrals. This is covered on our “Be Superior.” web page (captureyourmarkets.com).

You can benefit greatly from implementing each of the following:

- 1) Patient satisfaction surveys
- 2) Patient newsletters
- 3) Patient recall programs
- 4) Events
- 5) Packaged retention referral programs

Patient Satisfaction Surveys

Patient satisfaction surveys:

- 1) Make patients feel you are interested in their satisfaction.
- 2) Enable you to uncover patient relations problems and fix them.
- 3) Provide the opportunity to make unhappy patients happy.
- 4) Allow you to ask for testimonials and endorsements.
- 5) Open the door for you to ask for referrals.

Satisfaction surveys achieve their highest response when you hand them out during patient office visits. Make sure however, your staff asks your patients to complete the form before the patients leave. We usually recommend that the practice provides a box at or near the reception window to place completed forms in. This allows patients to remain anonymous for those who choose to do so.

Contact our office to receive a sample patient satisfaction survey with instructions on how to most effectively use it.

Patient Newsletters

Patient newsletters serve as an excellent vehicle to keep patients informed and motivate appointment making. Printed newsletters should be short— 8.5 x 11, front and back, in full color. Refrain from using generic newsletters because they usually look and feel impersonal. Promote new services, provide reasons for patients who have not been in for a while to come back and use the newsletter as a vehicle to promote referrals.

You can also send patient newsletters via email. When new patients fill out their insurance and other information, ask them if they would like to receive your newsletter. Provide them the choice of receiving it by mail or email. Make sure you get their email address if they prefer to receive an online copy. You will also need to make sure you follow all privacy laws, only send your emails to patients who have granted permission, and make it easy to unsubscribe. Patients in your database must sign a written consent to receive emails to avoid ensure you are not violating HIPAA.

Patient Recall Programs

We have worked with numerous practices that do not maintain a solid patient recall program. Failure to have one in place that stays in place can cost a practice dearly.

Always send patient reminders via mail and/or email a few days prior to their appointments. Then call these patients to confirm their visits

24 to 48 hours beforehand. Also, recall patients you have not seen in a while on a scheduled basis to set new appointments. When patients do not respond within a few days, contact them again. You should continue to do so until you reach them.

Events

Depending on your type of practice, events can be an excellent tool for patient retention, referrals and new patients. Open houses, held in conjunction with groups such as chambers of commerce, can be effective for a new practice, opening of a new office or when achieving a milestone such as a 20th anniversary.

Participating in community events, like health fairs, can prove advantageous, depending on your type of practice and the demographics of the crowd they draw. Be reluctant, however, to participate in such an event if it does not permit you to promote your practice. You should have a marketing plan in place for these events to generate leads, including employment of a tasteful follow-up program. Make sure, however, to attain their written approval to receive promotions through the mail or email at the event.

It is important to measure the effects that each event has on your practice. Contact our office and we will be happy to show you how to implement and evaluate results.

Packaged Retention and Referral Programs

Many medical and dental practices can benefit from offering a packaged program. Established correctly, a packaged program will keep patients coming back and motivate patients to refer others to your practice. Packaged programs can make member patients feel they are special and more attached to you and your staff to the extent where they feel like they are part of your practice's family. The key is to offer free and/or discounted benefits patients would not normally receive if they went to a competitor. To achieve this, you will need to negotiate discounts with other entities for related services. A program for a family practice, for example, could offer

free health screenings; breakfast talks; discounts on prescriptions, eye glasses and hearing aids; preferred appointments; evening appointments; newsletters; and free gifts, such as thermometers or a booklet on nutrition. A family dentist might provide an extra free cleaning a year, or discounts on teeth whitening or Invisalign. Your newsletter can offer health tips, promote services of your office and acknowledge those who refer the most patients to your practice.

The basic steps to developing a successful packaged program include:

1. Holding a focus group of 8-12 patients to determine what components and services your patients would be most interested in.
2. Taking the results of the focus group and conducting a quantitative survey on 30 or more patients to confirm their degree of interest in each suggested component.
3. Developing the components of the program based on your survey results.
4. Creating your promotional material including office flyers and posters, membership cards and application forms.
5. Establishing a bi-monthly newsletter. The first newsletter should include the benefits of the program, how to join, cost (which we recommend should be free), and an article you write on a health topic that will interest your readers (based on your survey findings).
6. Promoting the program to every patient and signing them up. Make sure you get their e-mail addresses so you can send promotions by mail or e-mail.
7. Advertising the program and its benefits to your community.



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