

# Marketing Your Clinical Practice





## **Marketing Your Clinical Practice**

### **Purpose**

Your new office is pristine, your employees are prepared, the hospital has sent out announcement cards on your behalf and your schedule is ready for the flow of patients. So where are they? You might have located your practice in a thriving community but even still, just because you are ready for patients, it doesn't mean they are ready to come to you. Promoting your practice is necessary to get that phone ringing with appointment requests. Just like any other new business, putting a plan in place and making some definitive steps toward promoting your services will help bring patients in the door.

### **Goals**

Whether your practice is new or not, you need to determine your goals. How many new patients would you like to add in the next year? Knowing where you are going informs how to get there. It is always a good idea to see if your goals are reasonably attainable. You might want to talk with more seasoned physicians about how long it took them to reach a full panel. The hospital is also a good source of information about the population dynamics in your new location and may have information about how long it takes to be up and running.

### **Service check**

Often overlooked because of its simplicity is the service check. Are you up to the task? If you were to reach capacity tomorrow, would your practice be able to handle the inflow from an operations standard? Too often new practices or even existing practices, entice new patients only to fall down on the delivery of the promised services. Make sure you are promoting on what you can deliver. If you suggest "same day" appointments, make sure your prospective patients get an appointment on the day they call.

Less obvious is how the patient is processed throughout the visit. Do they feel welcomed? Are your intake forms in good order and represent you professionally? Do you leave your patient waiting too long? Do you and your staff introduce yourselves to the new patient? Are next steps clearly explained? Patients trying a new physician need to be reassured that they have made a good decision. Make sure that you treat them well once you get them in your office.

Like it or not, your patients will judge your skills on convenience, comfort and service NOT on your clinical skills which are difficult for them to assess.

### **Developing a Referral Network**

If you rely on consults, you will have to establish yourself with other medical colleagues. Find out who they are and work to have a face to face meeting. The hospital can assist in making these connections but it is your responsibility to develop these relationships. And just like the importance to having your service ready for patients, you need to make sure you are responsive to the needs of the referring physician. Essentially --- communicate, communicate and communicate!

### **Make a Plan**

Your systems are in good order, you have a good sense of your goals, so now it is time to make a plan. Decide on what should be done, when to do it and how much it will cost. There are many



elements that you can do that don't cost you money but will take time. You need to develop a thought out composite of actions to help prospective patients and referring physicians know about you and want to try your service.

Don't be lured by a quick advertisement promotion. Physician after physician jump the proverbial gun and are anxious to get patients in the door so they splash a quick advertisement in the local paper hoping to bring patients in the door. More often than not, the physician will simply get an expensive invoice for the ad copy and placement and no new patients to show for the trouble. Be kind to your budget and be smart by creating a promotion or marketing plan that is reflective of your market and not reactionary.

Developing a marketing plan is akin to the determining the driving route on your cross-country trip. You want to know exactly what to do, when to do it and how much it will cost. While you are in the credentialing phase and not ready to open your doors, take advantage of the time by developing a plan. You want to look beyond the media outlets and consider:

- Consumer related health articles
- Event sponsorship
- Speaking engagements
- Direct mail
- Web promotion
- Developing referral relationships

### **Execution**

Don't let your plan collect dust and be caught in a reactive flurry of action. Remember that your plan is built on reflective assessment. Because your plan includes an integrated approach, you will be reaching out to prospective patients in multiple ways. So, the best kept secret in a good marketing plan is systematic adherence to the plan – just do it!

### **Data points**

Measure your results month by month and at year end. Determine if your projections were close to how many new patients joined your practice. Go a bit deeper and try to assess what activities brought in the most patients. Maybe the camp physical clinic brought 10 new referrals where the ad in the 5K Run only resulted in three. Collect the data and see where it points to future actions. This information will serve you well as you make a plan for your second year of practice.

### **Patience and Focus**

A good practice with a solid panel of patients does not happen overnight. Developing your reputation takes time. While patient are changing in their approach to healthcare, the predominant method for choosing a physician is word-of-mouth. And patients are looking relationship issues when they choose. Keep your focus, follow your marketing plan and you will see your practice grow. Good luck!