

Getting Known in Your Community

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Editor's note: We're happy to present a new column this year, written to help an important member of the chiropractic practice: the chiropractic assistant. "CAs, Can We Talk?" is authored by Rose Jacobs, a chiropractic consultant from Chesterfield, Missouri.

Everybody knows that internal referrals are key to a practice's growth and success, but I believe keeping your doctor's name and clinic prominent in the minds of your community is also a key concept. Whether you work in an established clinic or a new practice, name recognition will influence public opinion of your clinic, now and for years to come.

What I am advocating is the type of public relations (PR) campaign such that when an individual or family in your community seeks a chiropractic clinic to serve their health care needs, they think of only one clinic: yours. This is where you, the chiropractic assistant, can make a true impact for your clinic within your community.

Practice promotions can be costly. After 15 years in the health care profession, I have seen many extensive promotions: radio and TV ads, newsletters, screening booths, etc. And though these promotions can succeed, I found that a "personal touch" approach on a regular basis is more successful and a whole lot more fun. In this series of articles, I will focus on ideas that keep your doctor's clinic in sight and in mind within your community. I have found that when your PR campaign puts a smile on people's faces, they will not forget you, and patients in your community will think of you first when choosing a chiropractic clinic.

First, nicely remind your doctors that you have to spend money to make money. I have found through my experiences that staying within a PR budget of three percent of your overall collections goal is a good place to start. (Donations to community organizations are not included in this area. There should be a separate donation budget that is set annually by your doctor, but that's for another article.) For example, if your monthly collections are \$30,000, the budget should be \$600. If the collections are \$20,000, the budget should be \$900. The total budget does not always have to be allocated to outside promotions, but this is what I am focusing on in this particular article.

To get started, have your doctor invest in a laminating machine. (These are found at most large office supply stores.) In future articles, I will make many suggestions that will no doubt get the doctor's money's worth out of the laminating machine, but for now we will be concerned with laminating the doctor's business cards and some of your own.

Make sure your doctor has plenty of laminated cards each week. You may ask, why spend an extra penny or two to laminate business cards? First, it keeps the cards clean, neat and professional. When I think about all those doctor's cards that I've had to throw out over the years because they were too damaged and unprofessional looking to use, it makes me sick. Offices spend good money on having professional business cards for their doctors and staff, so stop giving them to the garbage.

Second, people will save laminated business cards over cards that aren't laminated because they

look more impressive and stay looking professional forever. And if someone keeps your card, they are more likely to use it themselves or pass it on to a friend, family member or co-worker.

The third reason is something I learned from a master chiropractor in Texas. By using a fine-point permanent marker, you can personalize the cards with a message or an appointment time. People like a personal touch. It makes giving out your business cards more fun. Try it; you'll love it.

Have your doctor also purchase a supply of business card-sized magnets with a peel-off area on one side. Make your own office magnets by sticking the doctor's business cards to them. It's cheaper than having magnets printed up. Now that the business card is laminated it will keep nicer, so people will keep them in plain view. Keep the magnets in mind. I will make other PR suggestions using magnets later in this series.

Next, if you don't have an office logo, find a printer in your community that specializes in promotional supplies (preferably a patient or neighboring business). Have them help you design an office logo. Make it simple but memorable, such as the following examples:

- TLC Chiropractic - Because Your Spine Needs It
- TLC Chiropractic - Our Family Caring for Yours
- TLC Chiropractic - Caring for the Health of Our Community

Once you have a logo which expresses the spirit of your office, order coffee mugs, ink pens (black ink only, please), balloons (make sure they are helium balloons and that the logo and printing are legible when inflated) and large sticky labels in bulk. The color you choose should be professional looking and set the mood you want to express for your office. Buying in bulk is your greatest savings, but stay within the budget. There is always next month's budget.

Now that you have these PR tools, we can get started having some fun promoting the clinic. (More fun? How can this be?) Here are some suggestions to help your clinic get known in your community.

For executive directors (I prefer that title over "office manager"), all bills paid to businesses in your community should be delivered by hand. Bills should only be paid on a monthly or bimonthly basis. CAs, ask your doctor if you can take an extra hour once or twice a month to deliver these bills in person. This should be done just prior to lunch, from 11:00 to noon, or just after lunch from 1:30 to 2:30. If you go by during the lunch period you will not be as visible, but that is the whole idea: being visible in your community.

This is where you can use the mugs and pens. Once a month, fill the mugs full of office pens. Put a couple of the doctor's laminated business cards inside the mug. Then make a hole in the corner of one of the cards with a hole puncher and tie it to the handle with a small ribbon. When you pay the bill, tell them that the mug is "just a little thank-you from Dr. Smith for providing an excellent service to the clinic, and that Dr. Smith highly praises your service to his patients and friends. (Now you are putting a referral bug in their ear.)

Then ask the person, "Is there anything our clinic can do for you?" If yes, run with it. Before you leave, be sure to ask for the name of the person you spoke with (preferably the manager or owner) and write it down as that business's contact person. Let them know you'll be by next month to fill the mug up with pens again. Mugs are more costly: pens are cheap.

Next month, call before stopping by and ask for the same person you left the mug with. Then ask

the contact person to set the mug out so you can refill it when you stop by to make a payment for their services. In the following months, leave something with the pens and a couple of business cards. For example, you could leave a laminated office newsletter; an office flyer with a calendar of upcoming events; brochures on your office's "condition of the month"; or a "chiropractic miracle story." Encourage referrals every time you go in. Your doctor is doing business with them; they should be doing business with your doctor.

Other places you can promote with mugs and pens are the city and county police stations; local fire houses; the chamber of commerce; the teachers' lounge in your local schools; car dealerships (I like to leave one with the service manager and another with the parts manager); and PI attorneys' offices. If your clinic is located in the county seat, the courthouse offices love anything free they can use in their offices. Be sure that you spend a few minutes each time you go into any of these businesses to talk briefly about your clinic, but do not solicit. Remember: out of sight, out of mind. Just be visible and friendly, then get out. Like you, these people have a job to do.

This type of PR will keep your clinic in the minds of the owners and staffs of these businesses. Later on (in a couple of months), you or your doctor should contact the teachers, owners, managers or department heads to set up back schools, ergonomic evaluations, spinal screenings in the schools, working with coaches, etc. The PR you did will be in the minds of these contact people, and you will get a more encouraging response to your requests.

We have only just begun to have fun with PR. Please look for the continuation of this series in upcoming issues of *Dynamic Chiropractic*. I encourage chiropractic assistants to contact me with questions, comments and suggestions for future articles.

Chiropractic assistants, I am here to serve you. I look forward to hearing from you. Until next time: go out and make a difference.

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