

The Volunteer Practice

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The idea of volunteerism may be the perfect opportunity for your local community. The majority of local nonprofit organizations have increasing needs and a lack of financial resources, manpower, and creative and organizational talent.

When it comes to volunteerism, the more the merrier. At a staff meeting, share the idea with your staff about "adopting" a special group and event. Ask them if they would like to commit to a year of events or a single event. Explore the idea with your staff and what may be gained from this commitment. Leading a discussion with your staff can help you discover what their individual strengths are, so that when it comes to signing up for an event, you'll have a good idea about how to place your people.

Understanding the need in your community is the first step; setting up a nonprofit group in the community is the second. Contact your city hall or chamber of commerce and request a schedule of city and community events. Also, inquire if they have a list of nonprofit or community groups. There are plenty of resources online; you can also check your local newspapers and telephone directories.

After you have compiled your list, categorize the groups (e.g., child-oriented, cultural, health-related). Review the list and decide which area you and your office would consider serving. This decision may focus on small groups and/or large events. If you select both options, you'll have the opportunity to explore the differences.

For the larger events (runs, walks, parades, dinners, wine tasting, etc.), contact the event coordinator or committee chairperson. Request a meeting with that person and inquire if you and your staff may participate. This could include sponsorship, manpower or hosting a complimentary beverage booth. In a large event setting, outfit your people with office-related T-shirts or clothing to show your office's involvement.

If you are hosting a booth or table, banners are an inexpensive way to give recognition to your office. If a banner is printed with a neutral message ("Smith Chiropractic Is Proud to Support the Community"), it becomes a reusable item.

If you are hosting a booth, invest in products that can be handed out, such as water bottles with the office logo and other advertising specialties. Face painting or hiring a magician could bring added attention to your space.

If you're assisting a large event, involve your staff, and your patients to help out. There's plenty to do at the larger events: assisting with the registration desk; setting up and taking down the booths, chairs, and tables; staffing a water booth or information booth. If you are participating in a "community event," I feel that structuring your booth to do a spinal screening is passé or may not fit the function. Instead, have a drawing to give away an item that will attract people to sign up. Follow up the event by inviting those individuals to a community week at your practice.

Small group events may also be very rewarding. If your office is closed one day a week, offer your reception, lecture area or basement for a meeting room. Adopt a local Boy Scout/Girl Scout/cub/or

brownie group. If you have a heart for challenged children, foster Big Brother/Big Sister programs. Find out how you and your staff can help the special needs of that organization. Don't forget homeless shelters, battered women's centers and soup kitchens.

Staff should be an integral part of a volunteer practice. Set aside a special staff gathering and share ideas about special groups and events and how your office could adopt a group/event. Have each person determine what their personal strengths are and how they may share them with the community. For larger events, schedule your practice hours to allow event preparation time.

If your staff is highly energized and does well in representing chiropractic to your community, consider acknowledging their efforts. Give personal time off, a gift certificate for a day at the spa, a special dinner offer, or tickets to a favorite program.

The volunteer practice may be a new idea, but take the next month to consider the benefits it could bring to your community and the exposure chiropractic would receive.

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