

It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas

Claudia Anrig, DC

During this season, we often become so busy in our family lives that we neglect our practice as a place to share the spirit of Christmas. The holiday season has many opportunities for us to give back in our practices. Within just a few hours, you and your staff can convert your practice into a warm holiday environment. Over the years, my sister, Dr. Susi Anrig, has been the creative force in our office. This column is a reflection of many of her years of bringing the spirit of Christmas to our practice.

Shortly after Thanksgiving, decorate a Christmas tree in your practice. Your Christmas tree can be a center of many conversations by taking a creative approach to the decorations. Each year, we order 100 spine key chains (with our office name inscribed), add a small bow on each one, and the spines become the main decoration theme for the tree. At the end of the season, we place the key chains at the front desk area for out patients to take home.

One of our patients took the spine idea and one year presented our office with a spine Christmas wreath that hangs in the staff office area. Take the larger spines on the stand in your office and decorate them with a string of lights, a stocking cap, and bells. Your spine can make a temporary home at the front desk counter.

Select some new Christmas CDs and mix up the sound of the season in your office. With a trip to your local music store, you will find dozens of old and new releases. Mix up the old classics with instrumental, spiritual, opera, western and contemporary holiday tunes. Your variety in musical selection (without commercials) will start up many conversations with your patients.

In your reception room, if you have a TV/VCR unit to play educational videos, add some Christmas videos to your selection. Play the classics (e.g., "White Christmas"), the remakes ("Christmas on 42nd Street"), "The Santa Clause", or a Disney movie like "Beauty and the Beast."

One of the senses that is often overlooked in our environment is smell. Scented holiday candles in hurricanes lamps, or potpourri mix that you mix with water and light a candle under will fill your practice with wonderful scents of vanilla, cranberry, and gingerbread.

If you like to send Christmas cards out to your patients, avoid the cutesie, pre-fabricated chiropractic cards; rather, personalize your look by having a fun chiropractic photo taken of you (with or without staff) and either attach it to a Christmas card that is prepared for photos or have a photo postcard made and place it in your newsletter or billing statement.

Throw a Christmas party for children or for the entire practice. Our children party is an annual event that we have done for almost a decade. Host your own party in the beginning of December before parents feel the last minute rush. Place a sign-up sheet at the front desk; if you expect a big turnout and you don't want to run out of room, have parents sign up for hour one or two of the party.

Each year, we attempt to have a new idea for our party. One example that we have done in the past is having small felt stockings made in advance for the children. Once they RSVP for the party, their

name is written with a glitter pen on the tops, then hung up on ribbons down our hallway. The night of the party, the children would decorate our pre-cut Christmas artwork with glitter and we would hand up their decorations in place of where their stockings hung. Stockings can be stuffed with small items that you can pick up at a toy store or dollar store.

For artwork for the office or as a project for the kids, prepare on different colored construction paper pre-cut decorations: Christmas trees; stars; candy canes; and a vertebra (having some educational slant can be memorable) with a happy face drawn in the center. This year we are going to bake in advance gingerbread men and have them ready to decorate for the children as a tree ornament.

If you need help in the decoration department or if you have a small budget, the school supply store is the place for you. For under twenty dollars, you can purchase a number of Christmas theme items and decorate your entire office.

At the Christmas party we always have a Santa Claus so the kids can have their pictures taken. We have purchased our own Santa suit, and one of our outgoing patients has been our Santa for years. When the children come up for their photo, we take two exposures. The first is a Polaroid. This picture is given to the parent while the child is decorating a photo cover at our decoration station. The second picture is taken on regular film, and we ask the child to hold the spine. We keep this picture in our practice family album in the reception room.

Instead of a Santa Claus, you can bring in other characters or entertainers to the party. One of my friends, Dr. Judy Forrester, has brought a Christmas reader for her parties. This older gentleman reads stories from his chair, enchanting the children for hours. Christmas carolers, a small children's choir, or elves can all be a great hit.

Want to take your theme outside? Contact one of your patients (a carpenter or craft designer) and have a chiropractic and Christmas theme built for the outside of your office. It could be a stack of vertebrae (with lights) wrapped like Christmas presents; a Santa Claus workshop with the elves working on toys and spines; or Santa Claus being adjusted. Your outside theme may just be the talk of the town.

The holiday season can be a very special season for you, your staff and patients in your practice. Take time to embrace the season.

This past year, I would like to extend my gratitude to many individuals who have been supportive to this column. The guest writers who shared their chiropractic knowledge and special interests for children; my chiropractic family (Mom, Dad, Daniel and Susi) for their inspiration; and my husband, Gary Janzen, who understands my desire to serve the children by serving their chiropractors. May the spirit of Christmas be with you and your family during this season and the new year.

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