

The Humanitarian Practice

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Every one of our chiropractic practices has the opportunity to reach out to the community and provide an extra hand to someone in need; after all, we are about healing from within. Hurricane Katrina is a recent example of a situation whereby a great need presents itself. As part of the global community, we should take time and see if we can help our fellow citizens (and global family) who have a great need.

As we have been blessed with much, periodically taking the time to reach out and sponsor an event or fundraiser is a commitment each of us can make. Particularly in catastrophic events, anything you can think of can help - much like the small differences in our patients' lives add up to a dramatic difference.

These types of catastrophic events, national or international, give you an opportunity to involve your staff and patients in responding quickly to the needs of nonprofit organizations that are especially stretched and underfunded. Several organizations that should be on your contact list are the Salvation Army, World Vision, Red Cross, United Way, and other relief organizations. However, carefully consider those Web sites that pop up right after a disaster and claim they are raising monies for relief. Often, these sites are run by scam artists preying on the good will of others. When in doubt, stay safe and go with older, established groups.

Other than raising direct cash, there are other hardship items you could request your patients to donate to help the cause. Having a family practice usually means that when you make a request known, you can expect items that will help children of all ages.

For example, you could ask patients to clean out their children's closets and, using an old backpack or sports bag, fill it up with things that displaced children (be age specific) undoubtedly need:

- For the infant bag: a blanket, diapers, wipes, lotion, onesies, socks, and simple toys that can be washed out in a sink with warm water and soap.
- The toddler bag is similar, but adding sweats if it's wintertime and shorts and T-shirts for summer will be a big help. The young child may have to be gender specific with the clothes and toys, but add reading and coloring books, action figures or dolls to complete the bag. Don't forget a toothbrush and toothpaste; when possible, avoid items that may require batteries (unless you are willing to throw several additional batteries in the bag).

When contacting relief organizations, the simple provision of water, diapers, gently worn clothes, shoes, and toys will go a long way. If your relief organization has a specific need, make sure the flyers in your office specifically request the needed items.

Your office might want to print a large banner and place it outdoors, announcing that you are having a relief drive and that your community may use your office as a drop-off site. Get permission from the organization to print its name on your banner.

Another option is to raise cash for a special relief cause by dedicating one day during which you

will donate your chiropractic services. There are two ways to approach this type of fundraiser: Your office can donate the full proceeds from any visits during that day; or you may want to consider lowering your visit fee for a "cash" donation to a nonprofit organization (which might stimulate your insurance patients to schedule for this day).

On a local level, you might discover there are special needs right under your nose in your community. Contact your local blood bank and find out if the mobile unit can set up in your parking lot; encourage your patients to donate blood during that time period. In exchange for their gift of blood, your practice can provide a gift in kind - a courtesy adjustment certificate that patients may redeem at a later date.

You also might realize your community has smaller shelters that often are neglected. Requesting your patients to help collect women's and children's clothes, toiletries, and school supplies can be a tremendous act of kindness to a struggling or smaller shelter.

Then there are the four-legged shelters; you might want to reach out to an adopt-an-animal shelter. Many communities are establishing "no kill" shelters for abandoned animals. Find out what the needs are for the shelter (food, adoption awareness, etc.) and see how you might lend your services. You could have an annual food drive in your practice or sponsor an adoption clinic in your parking lot.

Whatever the cause or humanitarian needs are - local, national or global - remember that as a profession, and more specifically as a family practice, we have a natural ability to serve our patients and enlist their help in assisting others. In this outreach, not only will those in need be served; your patients also will be blessed by the endeavor.

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