

How to Chase a New Patient Away in 60 Minutes or Less, Part 1

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Many of us went through chiropractic school with the vision of creating a practice where families stay for life and we enjoy having multiple generations under our care. After a decade or more in practice, reality tells us something different: Patients leave. In fact, if most chiropractors were able to keep a large portion of their patients within the practice, the demand for most chiropractic advertising programs would be nonexistent. A quick glance through any chiropractic publication will certainly tell you this is not the case.

While most DCs would not argue over the fact that patients leave, what becomes surprising is the reasons that propel them to go elsewhere. While it may be disturbing to think that patients may exit your practice for issues over money, lack of concern, inconvenient hours, poor location or a single bad experience, the fact of the matter is that the patients do leave for these very reasons. What's worse, your office systems (or lack thereof) may be unintentionally chasing them away!

The "Secret" Sabotage

Many chiropractic management groups lay claim to knowledge of "secret" practice-building techniques. While some of these secrets may have worked well to help build monumental practices in the '70s or '80s, there are a few that are definitely duds in today's day and age. In fact, the single biggest secret leftover from the Mercedes 80s has become a gargantuan obstacle for today's chiropractor. Here it is:



The most effective practice sabotage technique is to spend an hour or so pounding new patients into submission with facts and specifics about your particular chiropractic technique or philosophy. Once the patient's eyes have glazed over and their head is swimming with a multitude of

information, the next move many chiropractors make is to schedule a second visit for the report of findings. This is the next opportunity for the chiropractor to overstuff the patient's brain with more chiropractic talk and then present them with the gift of a comprehensive treatment plan that costs about as much as a good used car.

Here is why this just doesn't work in today's health care marketplace and with today's savvy consumers: At the very heart of this strategy is the problem that you are essentially shoving unwanted treatment down a patient's throat.

What You Cannot Improve

Let's face it - all the scripts and systems in the world cannot prepare you to improve at one thing: giving patients what they don't really want. Ignore this and you will find yourself with a miserable and ineffective practice. On the flip side, practices that are good at meeting a patient's needs are practices that are growing. If this does not fit your practice, you can blame the economy, the insurance companies, your lazy staff and any number of other contributors. But the fact remains that the patients you are losing are going somewhere for their chiropractic care - just not your office.

While some chiropractors learn from their mistakes and move toward a more patient-centered model, others keep inflicting the pain on unsuspecting patients and wonder why they get so few new-patient referrals. In fact, although I've never seen a formal study done on the matter, I would venture to guess that there is an inversely proportional relationship between the amount of hard selling that occurs in the first two visits and the number of referrals gained.

In other words, if your patient has to sit through hours of your philosophical explanations (via your mouth or video), jump through 14 hoops and a 23-step financial close just to start care in your office, what makes you think they would ever refer their friends to do the same?

Indeed, they will either refer their enemies or they will have to think long and hard about just how badly their friend needs chiropractic care while they weigh the decision on whether their friend can tolerate your approach. To put it simply, your methods are chasing your patients away.

The New-Patient "Chase" Test

Before you get completely offended by the previous statements, let's put these concepts into a bigger context and take a little test: 1) Can you handle more new patients coming in on a monthly basis? 2) Do you have capacity for more regular patient visits? 3) Have you had to increase your spending to keep new patients flowing or to achieve #1 or #2?

If you answered yes to any of the above three questions, your office may actually be chasing patients away. Here are a few common signs or symptoms that occur in practices that repel patients, rather than attract them. If any of these symptoms are evident in your office, fix them immediately and you will see growth occur:

Signs Your Practice Is Chasing Patients Away

First-Visit Flee: This is an easy one to spot, but sometimes challenging to fix. Put simply, if patients head for the hills immediately after your first- or second-visit educational deluge, your exam or ROF is an enemy, not an asset. It should be a rare exception when patients fail to return for their second or third visits. If it's the rule, not the exception, stop immediately and assess your exam and ROF for possible signs of educational overload.

Always Advertising: Good practices do not need to advertise much, if at all. If your advertising budget keeps increasing in order to maintain your numbers, you have a problem because your money will be leaving out the back door when your internal systems chase the patients away. Stop spending and stop looking for an external solution to your internal problem. Close your back door first and then open the front. When you are ready, patients will come in who can pay and stay.

Second-Opinion Objections: If your patients frequently need to get a second opinion or wait and think about your recommendations, you have crossed the line into salesmanship and not earned their trust. A good case presentation tells the patient what they need and gives them what they want without high-pressure sales techniques.

Referral Resistance: Strong, healthy practices have at least 60 percent of new patients coming from direct referrals. If your practice is really thriving in this department, referrals can easily provide 85 percent or more of your new patients. This is one of the few black-or-white symptoms of how you are either attracting or chasing new patients away. Few referrals is a recipe for disaster and an indication that much is wrong internally.

Turnover Turnoffs: One area few doctors consider as a new-patient attraction strategy is staff turnover. If you have a new face at the front counter every three months, patients will wonder why. After a while, patients will no longer wonder; they will presume that *you* are the problem because *you* are the common denominator.

Now that we have identified some of the common signs that your chiropractic is chasing patients away, your next job is to look in the mirror and see if any of these signs applies to you. If so, then it makes sense to look at how to apply some corrective actions to your practice. Next month, we will discuss developing a systematic plan for attracting new patients who stay.

JULY 2010