

## Patient Service: The Key to Your Marketing

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*This is part 2 of a two-part series on referral-centric marketing.*

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Without a doubt, referral-centric marketing remains an essential component for any marketing mix. While it may be tempting to chase the latest trends in marketing, never overlook the importance of attracting referrals from your patients.

Are you currently maximizing the number of referrals you receive? If not, let's first go over the four basic principles you should know when acquiring referrals from your patients:

1. Never assume that you will receive referrals. Ask for referrals early and often, and build this into your marketing mix. Don't *hope* for referrals. Hope is a lousy business strategy.
2. Implement a structured system of contact to ask for referrals. It can be as simple as a hand-written thank you note to the referral source that includes asking for a referral, but you need a system that is executed without fail. Consistency is key.
3. The foundational referral-centric marketing initiative is to *ASK* whenever you interact with a referral source. (Are you sensing a theme here? Always *ASK* for referrals.)
4. For every 500 referral cards you distribute, you can expect 9-12 referrals. Invite referrals by including three referral cards with each letter of contact to your referral sources.

### The Patient-Centric Referral

The patient-centric referral effort begins on the patient's initial contact with your office including your external marketing efforts when they are reached, when they call the office and when they first arrive at the office.

Improving your patient referrals is a lengthy process and it begins early in the practitioner-patient relationship. The fundamental concept to remember is that "satisfied" patients do not refer (or at least not three or more per year). Most of your referrals will come from your "zealots", those patients who were provided extraordinary service on each and every visit.

The following are important tactics to implement while building the practitioner-patient relationship, and ultimately boosting your referrals:

1. Welcome your patients with your best foot forward from the moment they walk through the door to the time they leave your office. Send them home with a new patient welcome packet that includes three referral cards.
2. Get to know your patient. Determine your patient's "aliveness:" what they love to do when not working or caring for the family, and then incorporate this topic into your communications with the patient consistently.
3. Let them know you care. From time to time, surprise the patient with a small gift that supports their "aliveness".
4. Host specific events for patients requiring they have a "partner" to attend.
5. Invite them to participate in a focus group event.
6. Present award certificates to patients achieving specific wellness milestones.

7. Create a VIP patient "Wall of Fame" to feature patients in a professional manner.
8. Distribute a monthly newsletter or news card to your list of patients with valuable wellness content.
9. Distribute a regular electronic newsletter to your list of patients with valuable wellness content.
10. Random telephone calls (non-marketing) to check up on your patients.
11. Random handwritten notes (non-marketing).
12. Find an occasion to send flowers to a patient at their home or place of employment when appropriate. Occasions can include: a promotion in their career, when they are ill or if someone they know has passed away.
13. Finally, *ASK* for referrals. At the very least have a "Referral Card Day" scheduled in your practice, where each patient receives three referral cards along with a script to encourage and inspire referrals. Do this monthly.

Now begin developing your referral-centric marketing plan, and watch the referrals and testimonials roll in. Remember to secure patient testimonials and include those statements in your marketing materials.

You can peak your practice with referrals, but to maximize your results, have a structured tactical strategy and you will be on your way to enjoying three referrals from each of your patients!