

First Impressions of Your Office

AN ATTRACTIVE ENVIRONMENT BEGINS AT THE MOMENT A PATIENT NEARS YOUR OFFICE. WHAT MESSAGES ARE YOU SENDING THEM?

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Thousands of chiropractors around the globe have found the secrets to using their office environment as a machine to attract new patients, better educate them toward a healthy, chiropractic-centered lifestyle, reduce wasted overhead and increase profitability. But for thousands of others, their office environment actually scares patients away.

Prospective patients have all kinds of preconceived notions about chiropractic, many of which are not at all reflective of what this profession represents or deserves. It's unfortunate, but true. Expectations become reality as patients drive past your sign, step out of their car and walk through your front door. Simple, inexpensive strategies will transform these negative impressions and prepare them for the health and wellness that awaits within.

The Approach

The path to your front door is the patient's portal to health and wellness. Inspect your entryway each and every day, and do so with your eyes wide open! Ensure that the trash can is not next to your sign. Be sure there are no cigarette butts or large ashtrays outside your door.

Planting colorful annuals is a great way to show life, so keep them healthy and properly watered. Have your landscaping professionally manicured, weed the beds and remove any refuse from the beds regularly.

Door and Entry

Your front door says a lot about you and your practice. Ensure that it conveys a sense of convenience and professionalism. While practices may accept every credit card under the sun, dime-store thinking compels doctors to advertise this irrelevant fact by adorning their front doors with cheap credit-card stickers.

The professional approach is to ensure that your front door is commercial grade, preferably high-quality glass with minimal trim. Cheap plastic storm doors have no place in a professional environment. Avoid residential aluminum or wooden doors. The threshold should be durable and not worn or rotting wood. A high-quality glass door makes a great impression.

Use a professional, easily read font for the doctor's name. This may also be where you want to include the names of other providers, as well as any other services that you offer. Display your regular business hours either on or within 4 feet of the door.

Tell It Like It Is

Businesses use signs to promote their existence, but for some reason chiropractors think it is important to tell their entire life story. While you may want patients to know that you offer more than just an adjustment, few understand what *wellness* really means. Decompression, AK, or upper-

cervical specific is even more of a mystery for them, so don't waste valuable real estate to advertise what very few people understand.

While you may want to set yourself a step above the competition in your neighborhood, use your signs to advertise the core of your business.

Signs are used to pinpoint your location to the masses. This means that unless you have a sign as big as a bus, be sure that your name and your profession are clear and easy to read. Avoid ornate fonts, as they are difficult to read.

You are what sets you apart from your competition, so be sure that your name is clearly represented on your sign. If a prospective patient remembers your sign, remembers where it is and now has the need to see a chiropractor, be sure that they can find you in the phone book.

Most patients will refer their friends to the best chiropractor, you. Patients also tend to refer you by name, not a slogan. If your sign reads "Chiropractic Wellness Center of New York" instead of your name, how can a prospective patient ever find you in the phone book? Ensure that the contents of your sign, your phone listing and your Web site are all consistent. It will simplify a prospective patient's ability to find you.

The position of your sign and how much time one has to read it should determine what size the lettering should be. People reading your sign as they walk in a strip mall need lettering of at least 4-6" to capture their attention, while signage read from a four-lane highway requires lettering of at least 18" and possibly as tall as 24" or more to be legible. If your sign is parallel to the path of travel, the size will actually have to be 20 percent larger than if it were perpendicular to the path of travel.

[pb]High-priced Madison Avenue ad agencies have highly paid researchers who determine the content and font size for a multitude of clients; so why not copy from the best? Businesses understand that messages on signs should be short, simple and to the point. For example, a Starbucks sign says one thing and only one thing: Starbucks.

With Starbucks, good business dictates that they do not include anything about being overpriced or high in calories. As a matter of fact, nowhere is coffee even mentioned. Learn from big business. Keep it short and simple.

Set the Stage

Find a sign in your neighborhood that you remember vividly, one that you can read in its entirety without having to stop traffic to do so. Take a picture of it and ask your sign person to figure out the appropriate font size. Prioritize the content you want included and never reduce the font size to add more information. In the sign industry, Less is more.

Signage is important for much more than attracting walk-in patients, so your sign should create a lasting memory. Including the time or temperature on your sign provides instant ROI. The reduced price of technology has also made electronic message signs easily affordable. This simple addition can make giving directions to your office a no-brainer.

Be sure to keep it classy. If the directions to your office include, "Look for the giant plastic spine-shaped mailbox," what are you telling your patients about the level of service you are going to provide for them?

More Quick Ideas for a Great First Impression

Night Lighting - The outside of your office should make a lasting impression (and hopefully not a bad one) long after you lock the door at night. Strategically leave certain lights on. Highlight logos or decorative items in your reception room that are not normally associated with a chiropractic practice. Let your office become something to be talked about and recognized by passersby.

Artwork - Adorn your walls with something other than outdated chiropractic posters. Instead, make an arrangement with a local artist and allow them to use the walls of your reception room as their art gallery. They will be honored to show off their work, and your office benefits with a touch of class that will keep your patients talking about you and your practice.

Flooring - While there is nothing as classy as an office with hardwood floors, unless they are impeccably maintained, they will show scratches within weeks.

Carpet must be regularly cleaned, not just vacuumed. Have them cleaned professionally at least every six months. Provide a high-wear material at the entryway to the office, preferably ceramic or porcelain in nature.

Avoid laminate floor materials. Laminate floors scratch, sound tinny and become slippery when wet. If you want the durability of iron, the warmth of wood and the durability of nonslip, look into something called vinyl plank flooring. You will be pleasantly surprised.

Lights - Create warmth in your office by replacing office-style fluorescent fixtures with recessed "can" lighting. This provides a warmer, less glaring feel and can transform your patients' perception of what they are about to experience long before they even begin care.

Water - *Feng shui* masters always suggest running water in a clinic. There are many self-contained inexpensive water features on the market today. Have your logo engraved into the substrate handles. Maintenance is also simple and usually means no more than adding a bottle of spring water once a week.

Fish Tanks - These are also a great way to bring life to a lifeless office, although they are expensive. Dead fish or tainted water will have more of a negative impact on the practice than nothing at all, so unless tropical fish are your passion, be sure to have them professionally maintained.

Basic Beige - The health and wellness that you provide deserves more than basic beige. However, if beige is your favorite color, select one wall as your primary focus wall and give life to it with some color.

If you are scared to add a different color, add some excitement to the office by using the same color family, but painting the focus wall at least three shades darker than the rest of the room.

Restrooms - Large hotels and restaurants know a secret that everyone should learn: Decisions are made about the products and services of an establishment by the quality and cleanliness of the restrooms. The finest signature dish prepared by the top chef in a five-star restaurant cannot overcome a visit to an outdated, dirty restroom.

[pb]Restrooms should be wheelchair friendly. The walls around the toilet must be tiled, not painted and not wallpapered. The balance of the room should be painted with a high grade of paint that has a luster just below semi-gloss or a wall covering that will simplify cleaning. While it may sound logical, do not use carpet on the floor of a restroom. Another hint from big business is to include artwork that represents a healthy lifestyle - and *do not* include reading materials.

Your Team Has No Room for Gophers and Robots

Your front desk should be developed so as to not allow your CA to hide from others. The geometry of your front desk should not allow a staff member the ability to hide from view, pop their head up to look around and see what is happening when a patient enters, and then tuck back out of sight like a gopher. That type of arrangement is very discomfoting to patients; almost as bad as placing the CA behind bulletproof glass.

Instead, make sure your CA meets and greets all patients eye to eye. This means that no front desk should ever be a sit-down position, nor should it be kitchen-counter height. Creating the staff work surface in a "perched" height allows your staff to ergonomically work on the computer, greet the patients eye to eye and comfortably complete paperwork without having to jump up and down all day. Doing so reduces strain and fatigue on your staff while promoting a calming atmosphere that will positively impact them *and* your patients.

With the move to electronic health records (EHR), it is more important than ever to maintain a personal connection with your patients. As your software removes many of the "traffic cop" functions formally handled by the front desk, take this opportunity to elevate the patient-relations component of this role and improve your practice.

All initial sign-in procedures should remain at the front desk so your CA can engage with the patients at all time. While it may be efficient, never allow your patient to think that they have just become a number and will be herded throughout your office like cattle.

Keep Them Smiling

You can have the most ornate front desk made from the most exotic materials, but if your front-desk CA is stressed out because she is not working as efficiently as possible, all of that hard-earned investment can be flushed away. A healthy smile begins with a stress-free working environment.

Proper workspace design places the most-needed items directly at one's fingertips. This means that a properly developed working environment can become a tool to help your staff do more in less time (and in less space) confidently and efficiently. That confidence allows your front-desk CA to greet the patients with a smile. Dr. Larry Markson suggests creating a positive feeling for the new patient by providing a simple, direct route for your CA to get out from behind the front desk to greet all new patients as they enter your office. Greeting them by name, with a smile and with a firm handshake goes a long way toward making them feel like they have come to the right place.

Tying It All Together

So, the proper signage attracted the model patient to your office. Finding you is easy and your patients are able to conveniently park within a short distance from your front door. Stress melts away and their physiology changes as they walk past the life emanating from your healthy plants. There is no sign of unhealthy, habit-forming cigarette butts, and trash does not impede their path to your door.

The paint on your front door is not peeling. Your operating hours are clearly advertised. Your patients enter your office with their sense of sight, sound and smell greeted by a fresh, clean, stress-free environment. The carpet is clean and they have a convenient place to store their winter wardrobe during their visit.

In short, your staff is happy and your patients are happy because they began their road to a wellness-centered lifestyle the minute they approached your office.

Let's dispel old myths and elevate the profession to the world-class level that it deserves. Avoid the old wives tales most people have about chiropractic and use your office to create professionalism, efficiency and productivity. Help your practice grow and provide boundless health and wellness throughout the world.

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