



YOUR PRACTICE / BUSINESS

How to Find Your Ideal Patient, and Help Your Ideal Patient Find You

Noel Lloyd, DC

Just imagine: You're at the front desk looking at the scheduler and a smile creeps across your face. Row after row, name after name, hour after hour; you're blessed with an entire day of ideal patients. Every day should be like this, you whisper. Exactly! Every day should be filled with wonderful, ideal patients; but who are they? Where do they come from and how can we get more?"

When you're just getting started, anyone with a chiropractic problem willing to pay for your help looks ideal. However, as you've discovered, some patients cause more trouble than they're worth. Not that we don't want them to get chiropractic; we just want them to get chiropractic someplace else.

Smart DCs ask at least three questions here: 1) Who's my ideal patient? 2) How do I get more just like them? 3) How do I make it easy for them to find me? If you get this wrong, the smile your morning coffee puts on your lips can be erased by the mere thought of going to your office. Who wants to spend their day arguing with negative complainers about following good care [recommendations](#) - only to find out they're also 90 days behind on their payments?

If you get this right, the most grateful people you know will thank you for doing what you love to do and refer their friends. That's when chiropractic is no longer work; it's your passion - turned hobby - turned incredible energy source. Goodbye TGIF; hello, TGIM!

Brainstorming Your Ideal Patient

This is a fun and productive exercise: Think of seven patients you truly love caring for. We'll call them the Magnificent 7. Ask staff members to name their seven favorites as well. Remember, staff helps attract and keep these gems, and involving them in this process gives your CAs practice ownership.



Next, at an office meeting, discuss what these patients all have in common. I'm willing to bet your ideal patient is grateful, courteous, keeps their appointments on time, gets better, pays their bill, refers their friends and stays under care because they understand chiropractic. Hey, is perfect too much to ask?

Now it's a simple question of what attitudes and procedures attract and teach what we want in a patient; while filtering out what we don't want.

#1: We Want Patients Who Are Grateful and Courteous

Those attitudes start at the top, doctor. Do you express gratitude and courtesy to your staff? Staff mirrors your attitude on to your patients, who reflect how they are treated back to the practice. Are you grateful for good work and courteous about requests?

Hot tip: Give a sincere compliment to each staff person every day for a specific part of their job well done. If you do, your patients will be treated better – I promise.

#2: We Want Patients Who Are Always on Time

You guessed it – be on time yourself. Nothing fouls up a finely tuned practice machine more often than a doctor who runs behind. Want to see 12 an hour? Don't run at 8-10 an hour.

On the patient side, insist on multiple appointment plans that project order into the future. For the person who wants to bring their own brand of personal chaos into your day by always being late, have [your CA](#) handle them like this:

"Oh, Karen, I'm sorry you're late, too. I can't get you in right now, but Dr. Lloyd has an opening and can see you in 45 minutes, after his regularly scheduled appointments. Do you want to get a latte and come back then?"

Please don't let Karen cut the line. You're protecting the ideal patient and filtering out chaos. Remember, you're training patients or patients are training you.

Hot tip: Ask your front desk to be direct with you on how you do with time.

#3: We Want Patients to Get Better

In my experience, DCs with the highest certifications in their chosen techniques and who insist on complete care plans get the best clinical results. It's sad, but not everyone gets better under our care. However, let's not let that be due to sloppy work or our failure to insist on strictly following a great care plan.

Hot tip: Pretend you'll receive a \$10,000 bonus for the best care plan, laid out in advance and enforced to the end. What would *that* look like?

#4: We Want Patients Who Pay Us

Even the best chiropractic care plans create a money problem for most patients. Create humane patient payment plans to handle deductible, co-pays and non-covered services. Then give your patients a choice of acceptable options to pay you.

What if the patient can't afford *any* of the options? This is where policy becomes a filter to protect you. Instead of struggling with patients who can't pay, care for those who can and do.

"What about the patient who agrees to pay, then defaults on their promise? You need a system to act as another filter and a CA who is trained to say: "Oh, Karl, if I can't keep your account current, I can't extend credit. I'm going to need the payment we agreed on."

On one occasion, my CAs sent a patient home to get the wallet they "forgot" three times and pay their bill - *before* letting them get adjusted.

Hot tip: Most of the bad debt in your clinic is an attitude and policy enforcement problem.

#5: We Want Patients to Refer Their Friends

At the peak of their excitement about chiropractic, tell your ideal patients, "I'd love 10 more patients just like you." In my new-patient orientation class, I say, "Tonight I'll teach you who needs to see a chiropractor and how to make a referral." Then I do what I promised, and give them free consultation and exam certificates for friends and family.

Hot tip: Make your top referring patient the Patient of the Month. Watch the interest and friendly competition among your ideal patients grow.

#6: We Want Patients to Stay Under Care - for the Right Reasons

What are the right reasons? Simple: because they understand chiropractic and it's in their best interest. If we want them to "get it," we need to "give it" in a way they understand. I learned that the hard and expensive way.

After being disappointed with the number of maintenance patients I had, I hired Hebert Research, Inc., to find out for me. The short answer was my patients loved me, but didn't think they needed any more chiropractic. *What?*

I was shocked. How could they have missed the message? Then I quit blaming them and decided I

would take responsibility to fix it. I sat down with each patient individually, as their care plan was ending, and explained maintenance and wellness again. Then I offered them a chance to sign up for a monthly adjustment.

In 22 months, I enrolled 480-plus patients into a simple monthly adjustment program. We started by loading as many as we could on Tuesdays. One Tuesday, we saw more than 80 [maintenance patients](#). It was truly an ideal day. The whole house was full of the best patients I knew.

Hot tip: Build a group of patients in your practice who'll make a full-year commitment to maintenance or wellness care. Start scheduling them on Tuesday and watch Tuesday become your favorite day of the week.

#7: We Want to Make It Easy for Ideal Patients to Find Us

I don't think it's too simplistic to ask that we be the ideal doctor great patients are looking for. That being said, I believe it's always on us to tell the chiropractic story; to be witnesses to the miracles we have been blessed to watch – literally at arms' length; and to take those stories out of the office in whatever way will bring the sick and suffering face-to-face with the opportunity to be the patients who are grateful, courteous, keep their appointments on time, get better, pay their bills, refer their friends, and stay under care because they understand chiropractic.

Hot tip: Don't give up...

OCTOBER 2014