

Let's Show Some Appreciation

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When was the last time your clinic went out of the way to show patients how much you appreciated them? Was it yesterday, last week, last month, or last year - maybe never? If your clinic is not in the habit of showing patients how much they are appreciated, we need to talk!

CAs, if you want your practices to grow, the key is to have patients that *stay, pay, and refer!* Of course, this is nothing new. How can the chiropractic assistant help? How can we motivate our patients to continue chiropractic care for a lifetime, be happy to pay for care out-of-pocket, and be excited enough to refer others to our clinics? I am asked these questions often when I am lecturing and consulting with CAs across the country.

Educating our patients is definitely an important part of achieving these practice goals. I know of several clinics that are wonderful about educating their patients, but still have too few patients referring. The problem is that clinics usually show a lack of appreciation to the people that mean the most to their practices: the patients. Everyone likes and desires appreciation. Does it not make your day when you are shown that you are cared about and appreciated by someone? It certainly makes my day.

When I am consulting with a clinic for the primary purpose of helping them to increase patient volume, one of the first exercises I have the staff perform is to write down all of the things the clinic does to show their patients that they are appreciated. When the staff indicates it doesn't "do anything" or does "very little," I know where to start.

If your clinic is serious about growing the practice, you need to provide your patients with a minimum of three elements: 1) provide quality services at reasonable fees; 2) educate your patients on a level for them to communicate and explain to others what a vertebral subluxation is and how chiropractic care can provide a better overall quality of life; and 3) show your patients how much they are cared for and appreciated by the doctors and clinical staff. Don't just *appreciate* them, *over-appreciate* them.

I recommend that the staff brainstorm during the next couple of meetings. Write down all the different ways, from inexpensive to "splurging," that you could use to show patient appreciation, keeping in mind the clinic's monthly marketing budget. The change of seasons and holidays are good times to make the clinic more festive. No matter what ideas you formulate, give your clinic plenty of time to plan well in advance. The best way to schedule these events is to begin or add them to your clinic's "calendar of events" so everyone on staff knows what is coming.

Here are a few brief suggestions: Start simple and keep projects constant, adding one or two more things in the months to follow. On a daily basis, every new patient to the clinic should receive a "Welcome to the Practice" card signed by the doctor. I recommend slipping an office magnet or other promotional "freebie" inside the card. Patients also appreciate a personal phone call from the doctor after the first adjustment or treatment. Why not also have the doctor call the person that referred that

patient into the clinic thank them personally for the referral? (*Editor's note: A friend who referred me to a dentist received a good bottle of wine from the dentist with a "thank-you" note.*)

You can be a big help to the doctor by making a list of the new patients, referral names and contact numbers at the end of each day. A "Thank you for Your Referral" card could also be signed by the doctor and mailed out that same day. Have your clinic hang a "Thank You for Your Referral" board in the reception area of the clinic. Post the referring patient name on the board. (For privacy purposes, only post the patient's first name and last initial on the board.)

On a weekly basis, something as simple as sending out birthday cards to your patients the week before their birthday can yield more customers or maintain patient loyalty. What about featuring a "Star Patient of the Week" award, such as a laminated certificate? Use an instant camera to take a photograph of the doctor presenting the patient with the certificate. Ask the patient to write a testimonial paragraph on the chiropractic treatment they have had while being under care in the clinic to hang on a special "Star Patient of the Week" bulletin board along with the certificate and photograph. To show your clinic's "over-appreciation" of the client being chosen for the award, I recommend splurging and giving that person movie gift certificates to take their family or friends out for the evening.

Lastly, when planning a monthly theme, remember to keep in mind the season or a special holiday. In February, have the doctor hand each patient a carnation on Valentine's Day. The doctor can suggest that the patient take it home to the spouse or give it to a co-worker. This will definitely bring plenty of smiles. For Easter, have patients enter their names into a drawing for a gift basket to be given away a few days before Easter Sunday. During a summer month have a "Patient Appreciation Cookout" in the parking lot of the clinic (after hours, of course). Bring in some grills and have the staff and the doctors serve hot dogs and bratwurst with all the fixings. Have door prizes for adults/families, and fill helium balloons for the children.

Whatever ways your clinic has to show your patients that they are truly appreciated should be in a monthly spending budget, be consistent with your plan of action, and planned well ahead of time. Remember; it is easier to *keep* patients than to *replace* them. Start *over-appreciating* your patients now so they will grow with your practice, not *away* from it.

Until next time - go out and make a difference!

CAs, I urge you to post your clinic's most successful patient appreciation events and projects on my Chiroweb link to share with other chiropractic clinics across the world.

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