

## There's Gold in That Closet!

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Ever wondered if your practice would turn a healthier profit, if only:

1. you could see more patients in less time;
2. you had more active patients;
3. your staff could play a larger role in revenue-producing activities; and
4. your overhead wasn't killing you?

Your underused supply closet can add more value to your bottom line, using the same space, staff, and clients you've already got, and without spending more time yourself.

The goal of your chiropractic *practice* is to help people live the healthiest pain-free lives they can. The goal of your chiropractic *business* is to earn a profit. These two goals are not diametrically opposed, but in fact complementary. Nowhere are they more synchronized than in the specialty items and services you can offer your patients.

To increase profits, a business must either cut expenses or increase income. The trick is to cut expenses without sacrificing service and quality, and to increase income without adding disproportionate expenses. Many practitioners wobble back and forth across those two fine lines.

But if you've already cut "to the bone" and also have put your best marketing efforts in place to attract new patients, one profit center you might be overlooking is your basic supply closet.

If you can think of your waiting room as an education center for your clients, and if that education leads them to buy a new product or service from you, you have just added income without expense, which equals profit to the bottom line. If your products and services truly help your patients, you've also improved their lives and will receive their continued support and positive referrals.

To sell to clients already in your "store," consider providing nutritional analysis and supplements, weight-management products and counseling, cervical pillows, cold packs, postural supports, and orthotics. You want to provide products or services in your office that are useful adjuncts to your patients' care.

Once you have decided which company's services and products to offer, carefully consider how you market them to your patients. This crucial step straddles the line so patients don't feel like your primary goal is to sell them a product. You need to communicate clearly to your patients how the product or service will enhance their chiropractic care. Of course, any practice-building adjunct must help the patient as well as the doctor.

Hone in on the products that allow you to offer better service and complement your concept of chiropractic care, without detracting from your primary focus - removing interference from subluxations. Because custom-made orthotics have consistently improved the treatment outcomes of

my patients, I will use orthotics as my example for providing adjunct products.

Although not every patient is a candidate for orthotic therapy, research shows that four out of five adult patients over age 40 can benefit from using custom-made orthotics.<sup>1</sup> By this age, the effects of walking and standing on hard surfaces, ligament laxity (age-related, hereditary or post-partum) and repetitive microtraumas have often contributed to significant plastic deformation in the feet. Asymmetrical collapse of the arches can be directly responsible for secondary postural distortions in the knees, pelvis and throughout the spine.

### Be Consistent and Logical

The key to selling adjuncts is presenting the products and services in a consistent and logical way. The presentation begins with the first patient encounter. Does all of your advertising include the products and services you offer? When calling your office, what do potential or established patients hear if placed on hold - silence, a local radio station, or the benefits of holding adjustments longer by wearing custom-made orthotics?

Once inside your store, patients should see samples of the products and services you offer. It is important to balance both general educational materials with specific benefits and promotions. This subtle introduction to your adjuncts will often generate sales referrals and comments such as, "I didn't know chiropractors could help with \_\_\_\_."

Direct each stage of the patient's visit toward a treatment plan tailored for his or her specific needs and concerns. Design your intake forms not only to ask questions about the primary complaint, but also to gather information about the patient's diet, work, sleeping habits, etc. Patients will assume that if you are asking questions, you also will have solutions for any problems.

### Report of Findings

Are you currently giving a report of exam findings? Ever wonder if you're actually reaching your patients and motivating them to accept your treatment plan? Realize that this 5-10 minutes of one-on-one interaction with the patient is critical to your success. This is your opportunity to further establish rapport and credibility, answer questions and inspire people to demand your help.

The report is the perfect opportunity to reinforce your use of custom-made orthotics, pillows, and other supports or adjuncts. During the initial exam, you demonstrate an interest in the patient's daily activities, including work environment, posture, exercise and diet. While taking the patient's radiographs, explain your desire to see the effects of these daily activities on his or her physical structure. Over the course of the entire exam, patients will begin to realize that a chiropractor leaves very few rocks unturned when it comes to improving health, especially when you took the time to do a full head-to-toe exam for only a "mere" low back problem. That kind of "extra effort" gets patients talking to their friends about you, which leads to word-of-mouth referrals.

All of your communications with the patient should reinforce the relationship of structure to function and health, and remind the patient that chiropractic is the means to improve all three.

In the past, I would ask my patients what they saw when I put up their films. Of all the responses, the only consistently intelligent answer was, "Something in the spine doesn't look straight." Everyone knows the difference between a straight and a curved line. Now, I like to draw a line connecting the

femur heads or a vertical line connecting spinous processes, which draws attention to pelvic unleveling and lateral spinal curvatures. I simply point out the crooked lines and correlate them with the patient's complaints. At the same time, I remind patients that the problems we may have found in their feet or the way they sleep may contribute directly to the crooked lines. Then, off goes the view-box light.

Next, outline your treatment schedule and have the patient commit to follow through with care. Whether it is adjustments and custom-made orthotics, cervical pillows, rehabilitative exercises, or nutritional support, patients expect to be told what they need to do to improve their health. The most important thing you will have done during your report of findings is demonstrate your genuine concern and your confidence in providing answers and relief.

Give your patients the optimal treatment plan (this will include your chiropractic care plus any necessary adjuncts) and let them choose the aspects they consider valuable. The responsibility then falls on their shoulders for the outcomes they can anticipate. If you have your adjuncts marketed properly, patients may accept your best plan at a later date, when prompted.

Using the orthotics example, once a patient accepts my recommendation to include custom-made orthotics in his or her treatment, the work of casting, ordering and fitting is handled by my staff. There is no inventory to maintain, and turnaround time is short. I simply verify the fit and proper use of the orthotics and monitor the patient's response and improvement.

A survey by the American Chiropractic Association reported that the average chiropractor sees 26 new patients a month.<sup>2</sup> If only half of those patients showed indications of foot deficiencies and spinal-pelvic instability correctable with custom-made orthotics, the doctor could expect the following net profit:

- Thirteen pairs of orthotics per month x 12 months = 156 pairs per year.
- Profit average of \$120 per pair (with a range from \$60 to \$180).
- Three additional visits to examine and cast, fit the patient and recheck the orthotics = \$300.
- Potential additional net profit of \$65,520 a year.

In conclusion, offering additional products and services is a great way to add revenue without having to recruit new patients. It is very important to make sure the products and services you provide serve as an effective partner to your patients' chiropractic care. With careful consideration and the proper marketing technique, including additional products and services in your practice can help both you and your patients.

### *References*

1. *Summary of Market Research Findings: Surveys of Chiropractors and Patients*. Northwestern College of Chiropractic (NWCC), Bloomington, MN, 1997.
2. Goertz CH. Summary of the 1997 ACA Statistical Survey on Chiropractic Practice. *JACA*, November 1998:32.

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