

Fixing a "Leaky Bucket" in Your Practice

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If a bucket has a hole, it can usually still be filled - it just takes more water to do so. The bigger the hole, the more water is needed and you can never stop adding water, as it will continue to leak out, however slowly. Occasionally, an office might experience what is known as *leaky-bucket syndrome*, characterized by patients who simply "slip through the cracks."

There are, and will always be, patients who cancel or miss appointments and don't want to reschedule; they can do so for many different reasons. Obviously, some of these patients never return to the practice. How does your practice keep track of these patients? Do you use a tickler file? What system does your office use for recalls and retention?

When a patient misses an appointment, their name usually stays on a recall list until they either come in or a member of the staff reschedules them. Or perhaps the patient is turned over to the doctor, who will call the them directly. Utilizing a computerized software program allows the staff to set reminder pop-up messages on certain days and times, which will ensure that patients are not forgotten. Computerized scheduling makes it easy to schedule, reschedule and keep track of patients so your practice doesn't suffer from leaky-bucket syndrome.

Do you have an internal and external marketing program in place so you really never have to worry about recruiting new patients? Do you get lots of referrals from your existing patients? Is your doctor doing their weekly or biweekly wellness workshops or "half-hour to health" presentations? You probably have great incentives that are bringing many new patients through your door. If that's the case, why are you watching those same new patients walk right back out, maybe never to return?

If you were to make a few changes, you might never have to worry again about having a leaky bucket. You might actually create a practice with a higher degree of patient compliance and retention, one in which patients and staff have more fun and you experience continual growth. Wouldn't that be exciting?

Chiropractic assistants who are service-oriented and trained in chiropractic by experiencing it first-hand will surely be able to stand behind their doctor. Chiropractic assistants who are properly trained to coordinate patients' appointments and hold them accountable for their care plans will ensure that those patients are getting what the doctor promised; the highest quality care possible.

Chiropractic assistants must be able to hold the doctor and team accountable to maintain an extraordinary practice. This happens from the inside out and not because of a Yellow Pages or newspaper ad. This occurs when patients are "talking you up" because you have an extraordinary team and services, and because you create a unique patient experience all the time. This happens when you separate yourself from the competition.

Chiropractic assistants must hold their doctor accountable for making sure new patients are called

after their first adjustments, and that random, frequent care calls are made to patients on a consistent basis. In addition, CAs must help the doctor to stay in present-time consciousness, focusing on each patient and creating amazing patient visits each and every time.

Chiropractic assistants must maintain and solidify patient relationships and be accountable for helping with patient education. Feedback is critical. Obtain perspectives about the practice via surveys, focus groups and continuing-education in-house workshops. Understand why and when a patient may drop out of care and develop nonjudgmental approaches to prevent the same situation from occurring with future patients. In addition, realize that the first impression is made on the telephone the very first time a person calls the office.

Chiropractic assistants must be able to measure and evaluate internal and external marketing to know what works best and how to make it work better. Plan marketing so that it is done with consistency all year long, and evaluate and track the results. Assist with patient re-evaluations, which will help patients see and track their progress to create a WOW experience. Simply stated, chiropractic assistants play a huge role in practice, and they must be willing to be involved and take responsibility. Their training is limitless and must always be worked on.

It is not hard to plug the leaks in your practice by implementing some simple changes. It all begins by making sure your team is very service-oriented. For the front desk, have a CA who is the patient coordinator, as this will allow for excellent follow-up and ensure that no one slips through the cracks or falls out of the bucket. A service-oriented team will enable the doctor to do what they do best: treat patients, provide excellent ROFs and re-exams, and get out in the community to attract new patients.

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