

A (Digital) Picture Is Worth a Thousand Visits

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As a fellow chiropractor who has owned 18 clinics and having practiced for almost 28 years, it is something I know all too well. In fact, it's something we as chiropractors have always faced: Our patients begin to feel better after we begin our schedule of adjustments, and as a result, they fail to complete their recommended care plans. This has a direct impact not only on patient health, but also on our practice profitability.

The question is – why? Why do so many patients take it upon themselves to determine when they should remove themselves from our care? The answer is simple: They don't see the whole picture; or rather, they don't see a picture at all. And it's incumbent upon us as chiropractors to give them one.

Picture This

The answer is found in a recent Gallup Poll, which revealed how consumers view chiropractic. Many found it very telling that nearly two-thirds of all patients walking into your practice want a complete understanding of their health condition in order to follow recommended chiropractic treatments. So, how do we do we best give them this understanding? *Give them a picture.*

Studies have shown that three out of four people (read: patients) are visual learners. But what do most of us do when seeing a patient for the first time? We tell them our diagnosis and recommended care plan, instead of *showing* them.

Many patients base the continuation of their care plan not on what we say, but on how they feel. And for tens of thousands of us, it's been one of their biggest headaches. Patient compliance affects practice profitability directly, as patients stop paying or drop out after partial pain relief. It also effects patient referrals and even practice efficiency, as many simply don't show up for their appointments once they perceive they are better; or they simply don't trust your recommendations ... but never tell you.

I changed all this by using digital X-ray. When I shared my diagnosis and care plan using an annotated digital X-ray, patient compliance went through the roof. Why? Because they could visualize their condition; they could see "the why," not just have to take my word for it. Given that the vast majority of people are visual learners, this approach makes perfect sense.

Patient Communication

I have learned a great deal over my decades in practice, realizing both failure and success. And in that regard, I have personally witnessed what amounts to one of the biggest game-changers in practice (second only to patient care): and that's patient communication.

With the vast majority of the patients walking in your door being more likely to respond to a real

"picture" of the actual state of their health, versus a verbal description or of a plastic model of what you believe their diagnosis might be, I invite you to consider exactly what you're doing throughout the day to communicate with them on that level.

I can point to the exact moment my practice began to soar: it was the moment I began to communicate consistently with almost all patients with an actual image of their spine, complete with annotations showing irregularities in direct contrast to where/how they should be. Compare that to using just words and models.

When you take patient communication to this level, it extends beyond the four walls of their practice. When the patient goes home and needs to communicate to their significant other why they need to spend the extra money, they now go home with a powerful tool – one that clearly and powerfully illustrates their need for care. And as a result, they comply with their care plans and are more likely to refer you to their family, friends and colleagues.

Patients, Trust & the Modern Practice

Consider the daily experience your patients have in the world. Surrounded by technology, their lives are infused in every way and on every level with innovation. They wake up to a personalized radio station streaming directly from the Internet – one that knows the exact type of music they want to hear and when. They have technology on their wrists that track heart rate and exercise routine (including distance, time intervals and location). They can tell their phones to remind them to buy carrots when they arrive at the store using [geofencing](#) technology, and they can place a two-way video call from their phone and speak to a colleague 2,000 miles away.

And then they walk into your chiropractic practice. Are they stepping into a time warp? Do they have the same experience as if they were back in the 1970s?

The point is this: A modern practice, complete with digital X-ray technology, isn't just a plus – it's an expectation. Practices that show they're equipped with current technology and apply that technology in innovative ways inspire confidence and trust in the patient!

That first impression is critical, and if they walk into our practices feeling like they've just been transported back in time, they're far less likely to engage in care, follow through with any recommended care plans, or refer your practice.

A Final Thought

Twenty years ago, it was common practice to X-ray patients coming in the door. In fact, you'd better have a good reason not to X-ray a patient. In recent years, fewer and fewer chiropractors are taking X-rays for a myriad of reasons. Film is expensive, taking film-based X-rays is costly (and often not reimbursed), and the entire procedure is time-consuming.

But when viewed in context that the most powerful way to discern the health of the spine is through digital X-ray, it's incumbent upon all of us as chiropractors to use X-ray as a primary tool in our practices.

With the quality and technology of digital radiography systems available today, not to mention the speed at which X-rays can be taken and integrated directly into your EHR system, taking X-rays to help

your patient better understand their condition and literally see how your adjustments can help them return to health becomes an obvious advantage for all involved.

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