

Keys for Practice Success in 2017

The way patients choose physicians is changing, so physicians need to change the way they grow their practices.

BY KIM CAMPBELL

The keys for success in 2017 are taking the same old proven practice concepts and doing them in a new way. Whether you are a practice owner, partner, or an employee, these tips apply to every dermatologist. Each and every one of you is your own brand and business. The way patients choose physicians is changing, so physicians need to change the way they grow their practices.

Every successful business has to have a plan. Now is the time to create a strategic, personal plan for 2017. The first item is to review your 2016 performance, especially in the areas of retention, marketing, and referrals. By analyzing your practice, you will see what is working, identify what is not working, and uncover areas for improvement.

After analyzing how the year progressed, start to develop goals. Identify action items, methods to measure, and implement a process to manage and evaluate on a monthly basis. This is a crucial step so you can measure your growth in 2017.

Relationships are major keys to success. The most important relationships in growing practices are referring physician to physician, the physician to patient, and physician to community. The number and the strength of these relationships is directly linked to your success. Here are some ways to grow and build those relationships.

1. GROW YOUR PHYSICIAN REFERRAL BUSINESS

- Use your EMR tools to connect with referring physicians.
- Connect with referral sources on social media.
- Welcome new providers to the area.
- Hire a physician liaison.
- Make it as easy as possible for referring physicians and their staff to contact you and be able to get an appointment.

It may take time to network and get to know the most valuable referral options. Building relationships within the industry and community and having a system in place to qualify and book referrals in a friendly and efficient way go a long way in

the growth of your practice. Suneel Chilukuri, MD, a cosmetic dermatologist in Houston, suggests taking time each week to go to a potential referral physician's office or to visit a currently referring physician. He states, "There is nothing more important than face-to-face connections. Make sure the referring doctor has your cell phone to easily and directly refer patients to you."

2. IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Make sure your patients get the best experience possible.
- Make front desk operations as convenient and pleasant as possible: checking in on mobile, electronic payment, easy ability for patients to review and share their experiences.
- Get staff involved in the strategy, goals, and action plan. The most successful physicians and practices have their staff (team) support. Staff are an extension of you, you need to have them giving the right messaging to your patients.
- Train your staff on the top three benefits of each of the services, procedures, and products that you want to increase.

Current patients are great referral sources. They all have families, friends, hair stylists, and network of people and followers. If they have a positive experience, the more likely they will recommend you to their network. As well, as you expand and offer new services and procedures, they will become repeat customers. Always try to have the patient book their next appointment before they leave the office and if you can, offer incentives for repeat and family business.

3. EXCELLENT BRAND RECOGNITION

- Be your brand and know what makes you distinct.
- Build relationships with hair salons, gyms, personal trainers, retail shops—these are good referral sources. Don't forget to include local news and media outlets.
- Conduct skin cancer screenings within in large corporations' offices, and ensure all employees are notified

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of the event. It is great exposure. If possible, try to get the employee email list.

Create your own events at the practice, local hospitals, or where your target patient audience would be. At all events bring branded goodie bags, sign up lists to collect names and email addresses, business cards, materials about you and the practice, and someone who can schedule appointments on the spot. This will also allow potential patients to connect with your staff.

4. ADDING ADDITIONAL SERVICES OR PROVIDERS

- Add services that patients are requesting and that they are currently leaving your practice to receive. This information can be accessed through patient satisfaction surveys, which also show you areas of improvement. When adding new practice offerings, it is a good idea to highlight patient experiences or provide a patient testimonial.
- When adding additional providers, look for someone with different skill sets than you already have in the practice. It will help increase the scope of the practice.
- Add technology, such as telemedicine, staff scheduling software, and reward programs.

Both new services and new providers need a proper marketing launch plan to existing patients, referring physicians, and your local community. Dr. Chilukuri reminds you to, “not forget about your telephone operators. Your phone receptionist is typically the first connection with a potential or current patient. Don’t forget to invest in training your phone operators about services and procedures you offer.” Technology is quickly changing the practice of medicine. However, you can harness some of these technologies to improve your practice and increase your patient volume.

ADAPT TO EXCEL

The heart of a successful medical practice will never change. Who you are and what you do can be adapted to excel in a changing healthcare environment. Extending relationships and building your personal brand via online media, as well as keeping up with the latest changes in treatment options are ways of providing continued growth into the New Year. These, combined with excellent relationships with your referral sources, great customer service, and excellent brand recognition are your keys to success in 2017. ■

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