

Attracting Private-Pay Patients

Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach to success, compassion, concern, and high-quality care go a long way.

BY DAMIEN F. GOLDBERG, MD

There is no one magic recipe for creating a perfect practice that includes plenty of private-pay patients. As the old adage goes, “I’m still practicing building my practice.” Eight years in, I find that building my practice is still one of my most rewarding and challenging goals.

CREATING YOUR PRACTICE

One of the single most important ways to create your practice is to stick to your roots and your training by using evidence-based, clinical medicine to care for your patients. It may sound trite, but treat your patients the way you would treat your family and friends: look out for their best interests in an ethical, compassionate manner. If you can adhere to this motto in your practice, you will create the best marketing for your business: word of mouth. Remember, a happy patient might tell 10 people about his or her experience; an unhappy patient will tell 100 people.

The following seven tips have helped—and are continuing to help—me to establish my practice.

No. 1. GIVE IT AWAY

Spread the word about your practice by offering business cards and brochures, and put your logo on the bags you give out containing postoperative eye drops.

No. 2. SAY THANKS

A little extra effort can go a long way. For each new patient that comes in, I send a handwritten thank you card to the patient and a consult note to the referring doctor. This way of showing appreciation also reminds the referring the doctor that my staff and I are available for his or her patients.

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No. 3. SHARE MEDICAL ADVICE

As a holiday approaches, for example, write an article on avoiding or treating common medical issues that occur on that day (eg, fireworks-related injuries on July 4). More and more practices use newsletters to update their patients on new surgical treatments and write columns offering medical advice for managing dry eye disease.

No. 4. ASK FOR HELP

Your current patients can give your practice free publicity. If they recently had a wonderful surgical outcome, ask them to make referrals to friends and family, and see if they would be willing to post reviews and ratings to relevant websites. Promoting your practice on the Internet does not have to be costly or time consuming.

No. 5. BE SOCIAL

Make sure you have a professionally created website. A well-written blog on your practice’s home page can improve your visibility. Promote your practice on Facebook, and be sure you are listed on sites such as Healthgrades (www.healthgrades.com) and Yelp! (www.yelp.com). A social media strategy requires some work, and it is important to keep the pages current. Continuous, shameless self-promotion is not helpful. To build value, you and your team can post things that people really want to know, like practical information about

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The archives of *Cataract & Refractive Surgery Today's* columns "Premium Practice Today" by Contributing Editor Rochelle Nataloni and "Social Eyes" by Cary Silverman, MD, have much more on the seven tips Dr. Goldberg discusses. To explore, visit: bmctoday.net/crstoday/premiumpractice, or go to the *CRST* home page and type "Silverman" in the search box.

your practice and health-management information on particular common ailments.

No. 6. POST VIDEOS

Ask patients for permission to tape an interview you have with them about your surgical outcomes and post it online. Use your website or blog to promote the video.

No. 7. GIVE BACK

Give back to your community. Target your volunteer efforts to attract the most relevant patients. Volunteer to give free eye examinations at local nursing homes, at schools, or for sports teams. My staff and I always participate in our local hospital community health fairs and offer free glaucoma screenings.

CONCLUSION

I want my patients to sense my concern for them and to trust me. The unfortunate reality is that, when we see patients, we all suffer from the pressure of trying to make a great impression while juggling the time constraints of busy schedules, caring for ill patients who can be aggravated, and managing surgical outcomes that can become complicated. Upbeat and honest behavior is always the right approach. The personal touch can be augmented with the use of internal marketing tools that allow you to follow up with them and also to spread the word that you and your staff are empathetic to their needs and will provide quality care. ■

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