

## 15. Building a Referral Practice

Would you like to know how to get an extra three to five new patient referrals every week? Of course you would! Everyone loves referrals. They come to the office already believing and ready to pay. They also make great patients.

So what do you need to do to double or triple your patient referrals this year? Follow these tips, and I promise you'll see more new patient referrals.

### **A strong vision for your practice**

**Referral Tip 1:** Develop a strong vision for your practice, and then clarify, strengthen, and share it to increase referrals.

I've coached thousands of doctors over the last twenty-five-plus years. I've seen the successful become more so and the struggling grow by leaps and bounds. The doctors who've developed referral practices all have one thing in common – strong visions for their practices.

**Exercise:** Write your vision for your practice, preferably in under four hundred words, and answer the following questions:

- What is your chiropractic philosophy?
- What type of patients do you love to care for?
- Why does that patient respond so well to chiropractic?
- What do you want your office to look, sound, and feel like?
- What do you want a busy, productive hour in your practice to look like?
- What type of impact do you want to make on your community for health and chiropractic?

Share it with your staff and favorite patients. Insert portions into your report of findings, New Patient Orientation Class, and anywhere else it seems appropriate.

## **I'd like to thank you**

**Referral Tip 2:** To encourage referrals, become an expert at the uncommon art of a sincere "thank you."

Good manners are in short supply here in the U.S. There may be a worldwide shortage. What's been called common courtesy – a simple "thank you" – will stand out like a beacon and impress patients.

**Exercise:** Write sincere thank-you notes every week to:

- Patients who referred a new patient to you (include a personal "P.S." for extra impact)
- Business owners or managers for exceptional service
- Patients who write chiropractic testimonies or give favorable online reviews
- Businesses where you have done screenings

Prompt your patients to thank their referrer. When patients get excited about their chiropractic care, I ask them if they've thanked the friend who referred them: "Ann, have you told Paul how much better you're feeling? You might give him a call. I know he'd be pleased."

## **Create an upbeat, positive clinic**

**Referral Tip 3:** Make over your office decor and patient procedures to produce consistent quality in customer service and patient care.

I've seen thousands of chiropractic offices. What never fails to amaze me is how many of them need a makeover. Most aren't impressive – and I don't mean posh features like marble, leather, and original art on the walls. I mean spaces that are clean, bright, and attractive.

Makeovers don't stop with the interior design. Make sure your staff members are executing patient procedures with consistent quality.

**Exercise:** Template a “perfect patient experience” in your clinic. It may include:

- Inspecting the outside for appearance (a freshly painted door and new brass hardware can make a world of difference).
- Cleaning, dusting, vacuuming, and throwing out the dead plant. Paint one wall an accent color and hang every certificate you have.
- Investing in uniforms for your CAs.
- Training your staff to deliver an impressive greeting.
- Running on time.
- Practicing Day One, Day Two, the returning visit, re-exam, and re-report, as well as New Patient Orientation classes with staff every month.

Think of your practice as a great restaurant and you as the chef. Polish decor and performance to produce new patient referrals.

## **Patient testimonies are valuable**

**Referral Tip 4:** Collect patient testimonies.

I had just exited the exam room when my CA asked me if I could take another new patient. "Sure. Where did he come from?" I asked.

"Our reception room," she answered. "He's your current new patient's husband. He'd been reading the patient testimonies and found a story that was similar to his. He started asking some questions, and I told him you'd want to speak to him. I already have all his new patient paperwork."

**Exercise:** Collect patient testimonies and structure them into three parts:

1. The problems the patient had before chiropractic
2. How the person came to be a chiropractic patient

### 3. How their life has changed for the better as a result of chiropractic

Keeping new patient testimonies in your reception or adjusting areas can be like having that patient sitting there all day telling their encouraging stories.

## **Just ask**

**Referral Tip 5:** Make a habit of artfully asking your patients to send you sick people to help.

A number of years ago, just after I'd bought a new luxury sedan, the salesman said, "I know you, Noel. You won't be able to keep your mouth shut about this car. Do me a favor. Tell 'em I've got more."

He was joking, but he also gave me three business cards with his mobile number underlined. I gave them to three friends, and I've given his name to at least a dozen others since. Why? When you're excited about something and like the people involved, it's a pleasure to refer them new business.

**Exercise:** Ask patients for referrals.

"Anita, Mandy tells me you're feeling better. How's your life improved since chiropractic?"

"That's fantastic. I never tire of hearing stories just like that. May I ask a favor?"

"I'm still accepting new patients and I love referrals. Would you tell your story to someone who needs to know about chiropractic and give them this referral card? It's good for a free consultation."

My mindset is that I'm asking them to share some wonderful news, not telling them that I need the business.

## **Tell them why**

**Referral Tip 6:** Teach each new patient how chiropractic works in a New Patient Orientation class.

This may be a shock to you, but most patients can't explain what chiropractic is to their friends or family. Patients can't make an intelligent referral until they know how chiropractic works and what types of problems respond well to chiropractic care. You need to teach them.

**Exercise:** Construct, borrow, or buy a New Patient Orientation class program and illustrate it you're your own patient testimonies.

- Require the class for all new patients and schedule them for it.
- Start your class at exactly the time you promised and let attendees go when promised.
- Use your patients' true-life stories to illustrate each principle (patients love to hear about real successes).

Teach from the heart about the most wonderful healing art you know: chiropractic.

## **Put it all together**

**Referral Tip 7:** Assemble the first six tips on building a referral practice, and then practice, practice, practice. You will increase your new patient referrals.

A friend of mine took up golf last week, perfected his game over the last couple of days, and now shoots even par every round.

What? You don't believe me? Good for you – it isn't true. And here's just as big a fib: A friend of mine got six tips on how to build a referral practice, and one week later they see five to eight referrals a week.

Every valuable skill takes time, practice, and determination to acquire.

**Exercise:** Track each of the six referral tips, practicing them daily until you master them, and produce a consistent stream of new patient referrals.

- Teach each of the six referral tips to your CAs and/or colleagues.
- Place a list of the six referral tips in your office as a reminder that you'll see every morning.
- Each day, check off the referral tips that you worked on.
- Do not expect perfection – just work to make progress and be persistent.
- Do not give up or speak negatively to yourself if you lose focus or quit. Just get back at it.
- Do each of the referral tips until it becomes part of your daily practice habit. Good habits lead to a good life.

No one ever stimulated more patient referrals by just reading about them. In the same way, nobody ever got good at golf without practice and perseverance.