

Use Table Talk to Increase Referrals & Retention

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Patient education is a never-ending process. Your responsibility for patient education begins as a “grass roots” effort. You can’t begin to compete with the billion-dollar advertising budgets of drug companies. To top it off, the health paradigm you teach is virtually unknown to the majority of patients. Yet with practice, you can polish your tableside patient education skills to increase both patient referrals and retention.

Timing Is Key

Be aware of the “Deer In Headlights Syndrome.” This is when you provide patients with information at the rate of water flowing out of a fire hose. They have no other response than to sit there in incomprehension as it washes over them. Take note of where the patient is in their plan of care and which information is appropriate for them. Giving too much information too soon will cause your rapport with the patient to break down and may result in them dropping out of care prematurely. Avoid complex and overly wordy dialogue. Practice making your point in 1-2 minutes. Learn to read patient’s body language, especially their facial clues for receptiveness.

Who Are Your Patients?

When asked, most chiropractors and chiropractic practice team members report that they entered the profession to help people. It’s important to be curious about your patients, their lives, and what motivates them. Ask about their likes and dislikes. Ask about their family, children, significant other, and friends. Ask about their job and any physical or emotional stress related to their employment. Ask about their hobbies, their car, movies they like, what they like to wear, where they eat...and tie it in to chiropractic! Connect the dots for patients. Let them know how chiropractic care can improve the quality of their life in the areas that are most important to them.

Let Patients Know Who You Are

When a patient accepts your recommendations for care, they are entering into what could be a lifelong relationship. Let your patients get to know you as a multi-dimensional, human being. Place family photos in treatment and reception rooms. Tell patients about how and why you became a chiropractor. Let them know about how you adjust your children and that you get adjusted too! By the way, when was the last time you were adjusted? Do you take the nutritional supplements you recommend to your patients? Do you wear the foot orthotics that you recommend? Be sure that you walk your talk!

Questions, Questions, Questions

The best way to start table talk is by asking a question. Take time to practice asking questions. What is it that you wish to accomplish: Stimulating a new thought process? Establishing new health habit? Generating a patient referral? Remember that people are primarily visual. Support

your communication with educational posters and brochures. Digital messaging units can be programmed to prime patients with questions while they are sitting in your reception room.

Asking a question interrupts peoples' thought pattern. Give people a chance to think about their response before you provide them with the answer you are anticipating. Great questions produce great answers! A powerful question is, "In 5-10-15 years, what will your health be like if you don't change a thing?" Ask, "How is your parents' health? Would you be happy ending up like them?" Listen closely to their answers and share your knowledge of how chiropractic can make a positive difference in their life and the lives of their loved ones.

Use Questions to Ask for Referrals

Asking every patient for a referral is by far the most effective, least costly way to build your chiropractic practice! The most potent practice-building tool is your one-minute message to your existing patients. Thoughtfully designed and pre-scripted, the message describes an additional service you provide or condition you treat. The message benefits not only your patients, but their friends and family as well. It's how you turn your present base into recruiters.

Sample One-Minute Message

"Something happened the other day that I wanted to share with you. A patient came in and told me she had suffered from headaches for five years. She'd gone to three doctors without results and had become convinced she was incurable. Well, I told her one of my fortes was helping headaches and, in fact, within about three weeks her headaches were gone. So, I want to tell all my patients that if they know someone who suffers from headaches to tell them they don't have to because there is help. Headaches are terrible things, and these people can be helped. Would you do that for me please?"

Practice makes perfect. Make a list of services, conditions, or products you'd like to promote. Write a 30 to 60-second script for each. Practice by repeating them into a tape recorder or video camera until they flow easily. Once polished, post these referral generating videos on your social media channels for additional impact. In no time, you will become a master at the art of patient education and referral creation.