

Build Your Practice By Growing Your Referral Base

Building and maintaining a strong patient referral base is critical to the success of every medical practice. Once your analysis of this important target market is completed, the goals have been determined, and the strategic direction has been set, it's time to apply marketing tactics that will move your objectives forward and start growing your referral base.

Tracking Your Referral Sources

Do you know who is currently referring your patients? Does your practice have a protocol for tracking your referral sources? Make certain that your office staff knows the importance of recording your referral sources as they schedule your patients. Make a point to educate your staff about the importance of obtaining this information and how the information will be used. Tracking can be as simple as having a manual system in place for your staff to record the referral sources for your patients or it may be built into your computerized billing system for electronic retrieval. It doesn't matter how you track your referral sources — it only matters that it is documented, as this is valuable information that should be reviewed and filed for evaluation and measurement.

Educating Healthcare Professionals

The more your referral sources understand about your medical specialty, the more likely they are to refer you patients. Through educational channels, you can share your expertise to build awareness of the diseases and disorders that you treat while also building awareness for your practice and for you as a medical expert in these areas. Physicians feel more comfortable referring their patients to a familiar referral source that they recognize as an expert in a field. Educating other healthcare professionals can be a very effective way to market your practice.

The Golden Rule

Treat other providers the way you would want them to treat you and your patients. Make your practice

Quick tips and tactics for educating healthcare professionals:

- Offer to speak at your regional or state medical society.
- Volunteer to give grand rounds or a lecture at a local hospital or healthcare provider group.
- Utilize AANEM slide presentations to minimize speech preparation time.
- Create and distribute a newsletter or fact sheet to providers that details common disorders that could benefit from your services or treatment.
- Personally meet with referral providers to answer questions or provide teaching opportunities.

stand out from other competing providers by providing an experience that exceeds their expectations. There is a lot of competition in the marketplace and physicians will refer where they know their patients will be well cared for and their own needs as referring physicians are met. Evaluate your practice from a customer service standpoint to make sure that your practice stands out in the crowd. The patient that returns to their primary physician and recounts a positive encounter with your office will make their physician feel comfortable in sending more patients your way.

Quick tips & tactics for creating a positive patient and provider experience:

- Provide consultation request forms to frequent referring sources for ease in making a referral.
- Provide priority appointment policies for frequent referring physicians.
- Provide prompt, timely, well-written, and understandable reports to referral sources.
- Provide an excellent patient experience by treating patients with kindness, compassion, and helpful information.
- Create an easy system for referral sources to schedule patients with your office.

Get Personal

People like to do business with people they know so get to know your referral sources on a more personal level. Find opportunities where you can network with other medical professionals. Getting to know them on a more personal basis can build strong and effective relationships that can be both professionally and personally rewarding.

These are just a few tactical ideas that may fit into your strategic marketing initiatives to increase your referral base. Get your entire office involved in brainstorming ideas around the strategies that you have developed and you will have an entire team of people working toward the goals you have set for this important target market.

Quick tips & tactics for getting to know your referral sources:

- Send an introductory letter with the AANEM brochure, "Why You Should Refer to a Trained EDX Physician," to new physicians in your identified target market area.
- Provide a sample brochure explaining EDX procedures, such as the AANEM's "What to Expect With Your EMG," for referring physicians to provide to the patients they refer in advance of their consultation.
- Host a business luncheon or event where you can promote your services.
- Invite a referral source to a medical society meeting where they can also meet other area physicians.
- Encourage your office manager to meet the office managers at other physician offices to build relationships and network.

Growing Your Referral Base

(Sample Worksheet)

Step #1: Review the current goals, strategies, and tactics outlined in your "strategy pyramid" (see article Establishing Marketing Goals, Strategies, and Tactics) related to building your referral base.

Step #2: Evaluate the effectiveness of past strategies and tactics. List the strategies and tactics that have not produced desired measurable outcomes. Eliminate or change the listed strategies and tactics identified.

Step #3: Brainstorm and list potential new tactics that could support your goals and strategies to grow your referral base:

- 1)

- 2)

- 3)

- 4)

Step #4: Review the generalized and specific referral source target markets outlined in your plan. Will a generalized marketing approach work for all referral sources or could you benefit from developing separate strategies and tactics for specific niche markets?

Step #5: Review your referral source "needs assessment" to maximize opportunities to develop tactics that will meet the needs of this target market.

Step #3: Review your SWOT analysis to assure that your referral source strategies and tactics are promoting and utilizing your defined strengths and addressing opportunities.