

# The Patient Comes First – Even in Marketing

**N**ever under estimate the marketing power of the patient. This very important target group should not be overlooked in your marketing plan. In an era where their patient has a world wide web of medical information at the fingertips, patients are taking more control over the direction of their health care. They can investigate their symptoms online and evaluate provider options in their area. No matter how your patients find their way to your office, on their own or from a referring physician, that patient will provide word-of-mouth marketing when they leave your office.

## The Patient Experience

The patient's experience starts before they even arrive at your office. Your practice location, patient access to physicians by telephone or email, timely appointments, short waiting times, and easy access to the office all impact the patients perception of a practice. It is key that you have a commitment from your entire office to provide patients with efficient and friendly service. Evaluate all points of contact between the patient and your office. Incorporate strategies and tactics into your marketing plan that will assure a positive patient experience and positive word-of-mouth marketing referrals. Measure the patient's satisfaction using a patient satisfaction survey. Surveys can easily be created using a paper form or by using a free online survey tool such as SurveyMonkey.

## Physician-Patient Communication

Your thoroughness in explaining the patient's illness and treatment plan is one way of demonstrating your knowledge and your personal concern. Educating and informing your patient about findings and procedures put the patient at ease and demonstrates your genuine caring for the patient's well being. Complement your verbal communication with helpful written communication tools such

as educational brochures and helpful websites that the patient can read when they return home and have time to process the information received during their appointment. The AANEM has brochures for patients on what to expect during an electrodiagnostic test that outline the procedure in basic terms. After their appointment, provide patients and their referral sources with timely reports and comprehensive findings. A patient who has a good experience will share their comments with their friends, colleagues, and referring physicians. This word of mouth expands your marketing reach and will help you keep patients and your referral base. Keep in mind that a negative experience will spread the same, but with opposite outcomes. It has been stated that when someone has a negative experience, they tell 10 people where as if they have a positive experience they say nothing at all. That is why it is important your patients have a great experience.

## Office Policies and Accessibility

You have completed the patients appointment, but the patient experience is not over. Charges were incurred and the next step is billing the patient. Timely and accurate billing is important not only to the finances of a medical practice but to the patient. When payment, credit, and collection policies are carefully explained, it can reduce the severity and quantity of billing related problems for your office staff. Unexpected or unexplained policies and procedures are not pleasant experiences for patients.

## Patients in the Plan

In a successful medical practice, the patient comes first. Quality patient care is at the forefront and a well thought out strategic marketing plan dedicated to your patients will improve the care provided to your patient and assure a quality experience that will keep them coming back.