

Why Sales and Discounts for Service Do Not Work

Kevin McNamee

A common mistake made by both new and established practitioners to try and attract patients to the office is to provide a sale or discount for services. An example of this is a free consultation, or lowering the fees 25% for a particular month, or giving \$100 off a patient's first visit. These promotions attract shoppers - people who are looking for the lowest price instead of service and benefits. These patients usually do not appreciate your service and move on to the next provider who offers a free special.

When an office lowers the fees, there is not an influx of patients. This does not work with health care services. Unlike products, which are used daily and which consumers look to purchase on a regular basis, services are sought by the market (your patients) only when they need them. For example, because the need for food is consistent, discount sales promotions on those products are effective. For health care services like acupuncture, the patient may need it only occasionally, so the sale is not the driving factor in selecting you or anyone else. The service and benefits you offer are the deciding factors.

When teaching, I illustrate this point by asking the audience which of them has used a coupon for a food market or restaurant in the last six months. Most people raise their hand. When I ask who found their dentist from a coupon, or which women found their gynecologist by using a coupon, virtually no one raises their hand. The most common and effective advertising method for health care is word-of-mouth marketing. This happens when a satisfied patient tells someone else of a doctor's services and benefits. Think of how you found your health care providers. For most of you, it was a referral from another family member or friend.

When you use discounts, you will see less income and the same number of patients you had before the discount offer. A better idea is to apply such marketing funds to inform the community of your name, location, and wonderful healing skills.

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