

## That Little Something Extra

Every minute spent with a patient is a minute spent marketing. What do you do to market yourself to your patients? How do you make those minutes work for you? By providing excellent service, improving the patient-provider relationship, and offering helpful (and healthy) products.

Unfortunately, many people who choose a career in Oriental medicine don't like the business or marketing aspects of the profession. As a result, they do not spend enough time learning how to make a practice successful. In some cases (as I'm about to describe), they will actually rebel against some of the best ideas that bring in new patients.

What about referrals? Do you talk to your patients about referring their friends and family in for treatment? Some practitioners in the field of Oriental medicine feel that talking to patients about referrals is too commercial. Not asking for a referral, however, or not instructing your patients on how to talk about referrals, just about insures that your practice will not receive as many referrals as it warrants.

When we stop and think about the people we know - even our closest friends, sometimes - we realize that most of them go through their lives not really knowing what happens around them or why certain things happen to them. They seem to go through life with a veil draped before their eyes, and while they can see certain things from a distance, or from a certain point of view, they can't get a full grasp of what's happening.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of successful people is that they have a dedication to knowledge. Successful people are always either learning something new or passing on what they've already learned to someone else. As I've stressed before, knowledge is power. Knowledge is lifelong learning that should be shared. The next time you're treating a patient, take an extra minute or two to share what you know with him or her. In turn, this will empower your patients and make them better advocates of Oriental medicine. They will share your message of concern, service and information as it relates to OM. Patients love to share information and tell their friends what you do best as a practitioner. As this information spreads, your reputation and credibility will become enhanced, and your practice will flourish.

This minute or two spent with a patient is reminiscent of the "sound bite" you see in a nightly news broadcast. Make those minutes count. Make them meaningful; make them interesting; make them fun; make them customized for specific patients and conditions; and above all, make them a part of your daily routine of patient visits.

There is a small saying with a powerful message: "The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra." This little extra is the service you and your staff should offer to people in your community.

As a provider of acupuncture, you are a member of the field of healing arts. A cornerstone of this "art" of healing is one's demonstration of goodwill. Goodwill is defined as benevolence, a friendly disposition, cheerful consent, and willingness (and readiness) to serve. In relation to your business, the commercial advantage of Oriental medicine, due to its rapidly growing popularity, reputation

for service and favorable treatment outcomes, reaches beyond its tangible assets. This is based on the presumption that you are doing your best as a health care provider; are making decisions based on what's best for the patient; and are ethical and fair in your business dealings and your behavior toward patients.

Every day, you have new opportunities to share information about acupuncture and Oriental medicine. These opportunities can present themselves in a variety of ways. Take, for example, the last time you were at your local supermarket. Did you walk down the "first aid" aisle - the one that contains all those different drugs and medications? Was anyone else in the aisle with you? That could be a good opportunity to walk up, introduce yourself and share a little bit about what you know.

I was speaking with an acupuncturist from Maryland the other day. She remarked that whenever she hands someone her business card, she asks that person, "Is there a health issue I can help you with?" She has found that many people will ask her what acupuncture can treat and what it will do for them.

The field of Oriental medicine is now in the education era: educating family members; educating friends and patients; educating other health care providers; educating employers and insurance companies; and educating politicians. Now is the time to spread the word about acupuncture.

And where can you spread the word? Begin close to home. Start with your patients first: every time one comes in, prepare to share a sound bite of information. Talk about the therapy you're providing; answer any questions the patient may have; and be sure he or she understands you. This process is fun and easy. Perform it three or more times, and it will become part of your daily routine. Just "keep on keeping on," and use each one of those marketing minutes. They will begin to add up and count toward your practice's bottom line (and those numbers can grow fast).

Do you have a sound bite about acupuncture and Oriental medicine? What techniques and marketing principles have worked for you? We'd all like to have the benefit of hearing ideas that work with patients. We'd like you to share them with us. As always, you can send in your suggestions by fax or e-mail (the contact information is provided below). We'd love to hear from you.

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