

## How to Say It, Part III: Word of Mouth Marketing -- Communication during the History and Exam

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The practitioner who does not outline the first office visit to the new patient, or who just says "Hmm ." during each phase of the exam, is missing an opportunity to share his marketing message with that patient. Use this time to educate the patient to your marketing message through conversation during the history and examination.

Your patients can become your best marketing tools if the conditions are cultivated in a safe and informative manner. When your patients are excited about the care you provide, they become your best advocates for referrals. The patients will share their new discovery - you - with everyone they meet. However, you need to give the patient the words to use when communicating the unique healing features your practice has to offer. This means you need to become focused on what message you want your patient to remember after the first visit. Ask yourself: what key phrases do I want them to say when someone asks them what happened? The patient will use words that he/she remembers to describe the visit to others. Ultimately, this is what will sell you and bring others into your office.

Deciding which points to mention during the first visit depends on what makes you unique or separates you from everyone else. It could be that you are very thorough in your evaluation; that you offer an individualized treatment plan with a variety of treatment options; that your goal is to help patients become more self-reliant by using the wellness methods shown at the practice; or that your practice combines the best of Oriental and Western medicine. Proceed by using the points you wish the patient to remember.

Interject these phrases at strategic times. For example, when you and the patient sit to conduct a history, take that opportunity to outline what the patient should expect during the visit, and its purpose. Mention the phases of the first visit, the purpose of each phase, and the length of time for the encounter - much like the host of a television show. This way, the patient understands what to expect and can better prepare.

For example, let's say I want to emphasize certain areas so that the patient will use this information to market my message to his/her family and circle of friends.

First, I tell the patient that there is an eventual end to the treatment plan and that it will not go on forever. Second, I also want to emphasize that the first visit is very important because it outlines how best to treat the patient. Therefore, I must be very thorough with my examination. This way, I can determine if the patient should be seen by me or sent to another doctor. Third, I mention that I use a variety of treatment options depending on the healing phase and nature of the patient's condition.

The dialogue may go like this: *"Good to meet you, Ms. Jones. How may I help you today?"*

After an overview is complete, you may say something like: *"Your first visit will be in three parts. The first part is the history, which consists of a series of questions I am going to ask about your condition. Your answers will help me determine which type of examination is needed. The history and examination will take about one hour. I like to be thorough so I learn how best to treat your problem. If I do not feel I can help you, I will let you know and make some suggestions as to whom I think can help. Any questions? Let's begin."*

The history proceeds. At the conclusion of the history, finish with the question, *"Is there anything else in your history you feel is important for me to know?"*

Then the examination begins. As you proceed, explain to the patient in a thumbnail sketch what you are doing. For example: *"I am testing your range of motion. Please bend forward until you feel pain." Reassure the patient that all answers are correct. "Do not answer based on what you think I want to hear. I am collecting data and will put everything together at the end of the exam."*

When the examination is finished, one option is to go over the positive findings and determine what the next step should be. This may consist of 1) *"I need to do additional tests because of ----- I found in the history and examination,"* or 2) *"Based on the history and exam findings, I am going to start with the following therapies · After ----- and ----- improve, then we will use ----- and ----- therapy. Finally, when we reach the end, we will do ----- so you can become independent of the office and only need to return when ----- does not help. I will tailor the treatment plan based on how quickly you progress, so I will be re-evaluating your progress at each subsequent visit. I am looking for -----, ----- and ----- to improve as I change the treatment plan at each phase of recovery. Do you have any questions?"*

From the above, patients will remember that you are very thorough, that you have many treatment options, and that you are trying to get them independent from the office.

Think about what makes you unique and what message you want the patient to take with them and say about you. When you get referrals from previously satisfied patients, you will find that the new patient may say things like, "Ms. Jones told me about you and how thorough you are. That's why I'm here." When you hear your phrases being repeated by your patients or the people they refer, remember those phrases and use them more frequently in the future. Those phrases are what sticks in the public mind, and they are very valuable to your success as a practitioner.

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