

Four Powerful Steps for Practitioners to Attract More Patients

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Attracting new patients. Admit it: that's what running a successful clinic is all about - getting more people to know about you and purchase your services. The more people, the better. Why else would you work so hard and spend so much to learn this medicine, create a beautiful, welcoming clinic, and offer the best possible services? I don't believe you went through all this to languish in obscurity or poverty. You work so hard because you know you have something of value to offer - and you want to reach as many people as possible with this medicine, because it can help them live a healthier life.

Marketing is what helps you reach your goal of a busy, prosperous clinic, but it's also a subject that confuses a lot of practitioners. We all know we need to promote ourselves and our medicine, but some of us may not know where to start, or how to continue regularly and effectively.

A Sample Scenario

Let's say you live in an average U.S. city, and that you get 1,000 people in a room and give a talk on acupuncture/Chinese medicine. You would talk about your services and about the history of Chinese medicine, or you would discuss research on specific medical conditions. You might have literature to pass out; books for sale; business cards to distribute; slides or photos of a recent trip to China, etc.

After this direct exposure, chances are at least 1-4% of these people would call you for a treatment, or to discuss the possibility of treatment. That's 10-40 people. "But how," you ask, "will I get that many people to know about me? I can't get that many people in a room." Since you probably don't have the budget to create the kind of advertising that would get that kind of response, *you must find creative, low-cost ways to go directly to those 1-4% and bypass those that are not interested.* It's not worth promoting yourself to people who will most likely never embrace your words.

Here are four steps to reach potential new patients:

1. Define Who You Are and What Sets You Apart

You have a clear idea about what Chinese medicine and acupuncture are, and what they can do. You know what services you do and don't want to offer. Can you also delineate what makes you and your services unique? Is it your specialty (gynecology; mental-emotional disease; children's care; sports medicine); the beauty and healing environment of your clinic; better parking; a special sub-group of people that you serve, etc.?

2. Describe Your Ideal Patient and the Conditions You Want to Treat Sets You Apart

After step one, figure out what kinds of problems or patients are your "ideal." Do you only want to see patients over age 21? Do you only want rock climbing enthusiasts with musculoskeletal

problems? Whatever it is, be as clear with yourself about these two items as possible.

3. List the Ways/Places You Can Get Access to People with These Conditions

Think about what these types of patients do: what they buy; where they shop; where they hang out; what publications they read; what radio stations they listen to; what websites they visit; what e-mail newsletters they subscribe to; what their habits are; and where you can find them. For example, if you want to treat rock climbing enthusiasts (because you are one, too), go to your favorite search engine and type in "rock climbing."

Also go to the Yellow Pages for your city or region and look up everything to do with rock climbing that you can find, then analyze the search results and compile a list of every company, organization, store or other entity that has to do with this subject. Evaluate the results and compile a list of every avenue of potential marketing you find.

4. Think of Inexpensive Ways to Network and Promote Yourself to (and with) This List

Now that you have a list of possible allies and patients, it's time to get busy. Contact everyone on the list and offer them something that would be a "perk" for their members, customers, readers, etc. Write articles for Web sites, magazines, e-mail newsletters, and club and organization newsletters about the benefits of acupuncture for climbers. Contact outdoor gear stores, rock gyms, climbing clubs and associations, and ask to give free talks about the same subject. Use the same material you just wrote up in an article. For example, you could have the local rock-climbing gym sponsor a talk, with you as the speaker. Make sure there's something in it for the owner or manager of the store - maybe a free treatment, for example. Everyone who comes to the talk, which is about the benefits of acupuncture for climbers (increased stamina; less hand and finger pain; fast injury healing; etc.), receives a free article about climbing and hand pain (or whatever the subject is). You might also have some personalized items on hand, such as carabiners; climbing chalk bags; energy bars; or other small climbing paraphernalia that has your name and phone number to give to the climbers - you get the idea. Bring cards, brochures - anything that you can give out for free.

Remember, not all of your efforts will make a "hit." However, concentrated efforts such as these will bring you new patients. Also, remember that these people know, talk and climb with each other. If you have success treating a few people, the entire regional climbing community will hear of you. The same holds true no matter what your specialty is. Through these efforts, you will create a brand name for yourself: the local "acudoc" who treats climbers. You will become the "in" practitioner to visit in these circles. This is exactly what you want. Always remember to ask your climbing patients for referrals, so you can build a practice that allows you to get very good at one specialty - which is much easier than knowing everything about everything.

The message here is, don't try to market yourself to everyone. Find your ideal patients and market yourself doggedly to them. Why spend money on a newspaper ad to the general public when you only want to treat a certain segment of the population? Save your effort and money *and* be more effective by going directly to those valuable 1-4% you really want to serve and who want your services.

Good luck!

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