



YOUR PRACTICE / BUSINESS

How To Increase Your Referrals

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As a result of my early intervention into American acupuncture in 1971, my practice grew at a steady and very fast rate as more and more people sought acupuncture nationally as a result of the reports of seemingly miraculous clinical response.

By 1973, my clinic had become one of the largest and most successful acupuncture practices in North America at a time when "voodoo" was a word most often associated with its practice. The medical profession regarded acupuncture as quackery or hypnosis and acupuncture as a profession was more than 10 years in the future. Today, there is more potential than ever to achieve a full, busy referral based acupuncture practice for literally all practitioners, as acupuncture's acceptance has become matter of fact, through both the general public as well as the scientific community.

Today, in the U.S. alone, there are millions of patients who seek our service and there are less than 50,000 practitioners counting all LAc's in addition to the chiropractic and medical doctors who employ acupuncture. Which means the current number of practitioners available for the number of people who wish to see us is staggeringly off balance. What is the difference between the practitioner who is seeing just a handful of patients compared to the one who is booked weeks in advance? I know of an acupuncturist who boasts he is booked three weeks out however, he only sees a maximum of four patients a day. The last I heard he was having major financial difficulties. Can you see more? Should you see more? It is a matter of technique and style. Interestingly enough, the percentage of patients who achieve remarkable clinical success is just as high in the practice that sees 40 patients a day as the one who sees four patients a day.

Did you ever have to wait an hour or more in a restaurant for a table? Obviously, it was not the greasy spoon in the middle of the block or the restaurant with either poor food or poor service. It is usually an upscale spot with unique surroundings, or an old established restaurant with just great food. In essence the busiest restaurants are not the ones who generally advertise the most, they are the ones who achieve "fantastic results." When was the last time you referred a friend or family member to a less than adequate restaurant? On the other hand, your enthusiasm for the unique one came with your highest accolades. The same, is true of a clinical practice.

However, I learned early in my career that a little help in getting your patients to refer is certainly legitimate, just as the restaurant owner might say on your leaving, "If you had a great experience, tell your friends." Just because you achieve good results in many of your patients is often times not enough motivating force to get them to refer. Just because you're clean, neat, brave, trustworthy, kind, reverent and every other adjective for the perfect person, is often times not enough to get patients to refer either. How many times have you achieved great healing response only to never hear from the patient and besides that you're a great person? Often times people just aren't thinking of telling others about their experiences unless they're really motivated. How motivated are your patients to refer to

you? In fact ask yourself this question - Why should someone refer their friend, co-worker or family member to you?

While you're asking questions, take this quiz: What's the first name of the person who cuts your hair? How many if any kids does he/she have? What is the husband/wife name and what do they do for a living? Think about it, this is the person you see on a regular basis and if you're typical they have been cutting your hair for some time now. You discuss sports, politics, movies, current events, in fact you probably have as much or more conversation and idle chit chat with this person than anyone else in your life. Besides that, they are a great person! Ask yourself this question, with all of this, how many people did you refer to the person who cuts your hair last year? Keep in mind, their success is predicated on referrals. In fact how do you think their clientele grows. What was your participation in their success?

So, how many people did you refer to your favorite restaurant, insurance agent, accountant, etc. Why should someone refer to you? What if you asked your patients to refer because you are currently building the biggest and best acupuncture facility in this part of the state? How could they refuse? They couldn't, just as you would refer to your hairstylist or barber if only they had asked. That's the point!

Did you ever stop to think the greatest compliment a person can pay us is not glowing comments about how wonderful we are, but it is the simple act of referring and entrusting their family and friends health into our hands, What an incredible compliment! Are you sending personalized handwritten thank you notes or some funky form letter with no personalization? Please, don't send one unless it is personalized with your message and signature.

The bottom line of the referral practice is actually very simple, strive to achieve outstanding clinical response in the least amount of time, motivate patients by impressing them with a nice clean well maintained office, as well as the professional appearance of the practitioner and office staff. Explain the procedures used in an easy clear cut manner so that they can go home and tell their husband/wife what transpired without all the razzle dazzle.

Should you have an assistant who is less than perfect, get one that is. This will destroy you faster than anything. Years ago, my clinic employed 12 assistants in my practice. Absolutely amazing how regardless of how competent I may have been, sometimes people would never come back only because the way they were treated by an assistant. Did you ever go to a restaurant only to be met by a waiter/waitress who turned you off so bad you stated you would never go back there again? Well guess what, it happens all the time in every endeavor.

Why do you suppose acupuncture has grown to the unprecedented level of public acceptance it has in such a short period of time. To me the answer is easy. Acupuncture delivers quick clinical results in a very short period of time and it is comparatively speaking, very inexpensive. I think B.J. Palmer the developer of chiropractic said it best, "The fundamental of this clinic is to see how little we can do at how few places, how rarely and how quickly it can be done to accomplish the greatest change in the shortest space of time at least cost to case and to know what to do and why we do it before doing it."

I am totally convinced, striving for the quickest most dramatic clinical response and releasing the patient to maintenance care as early as possible is one of the major keys to a high referral practice. Remember that everyone has a dentist and they only see they're patients twice a year on average unless an emergency comes up. Because they see them twice a year routinely, people will see the

same dentist for years and years.

Asian tradition is to see patients routinely whenever the polarity of the earth changes, that is, when fall turns to winter and winter turns to spring, when spring brings forth summer and summer gives way to fall at this four times of the year the universe is in a energy flux. What a great time to see patients, if we only saw our patients four times a year, whenever an emergency arose and as needed in between.

If you can go to your office tomorrow and tell Mrs. Jones, that you are trying to build the biggest and best acupuncture facility in this part of the state and you need their help to do so, I will assure you success. I personally conduct a straight cash, no insurance practice. I accept no personal injury cases, or insurance in any way shape or form. I do not participate in any HMOs and have no intention of ever doing so. My job is of a healer not an insurance pawn. My job is to help patients as quickly and as economical as possible. As a result, patients have always flocked to my office. Remember, regardless of insurance or anything else, people are going to go where they can get the most for their time and money.

Also, remember the No.1 rule of practice financial success and that is, to serve your patient not your bank account. As long as we have single mindedness of purpose in assisting the patient with their health needs the referrals and financial rewards will follow as long as other very vital rules are followed.

As more and more practitioners of acupuncture set up practice across the nation, do not look upon them as competition. Only 3% of any profession, occupation, or endeavor make it to the very top. Strive by your continued study, spirit, compassion and dedication to become the best in acupuncture. Patients will always seek out the best! You may either thrive or survive I think I know which you prefer. The choice is ours.

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