



MARKETING / OFFICE / STAFF

Who is Your Ideal Patient?

Kelley Mulhern, DC

Being in a healthcare practice requires you to think critically about many things including your equipment, techniques, documentation, financial goals, and the retention of clients and staff. These "hard" concepts and skills often demand much of your time and attention. As a result, less time is spent focusing on the mindset, energy, and emotions behind your practice. In business literature, these softer concepts are referenced with the term "strategic planning." Strategic planning specifically refers to the purpose, mission, vision, values, goals, and culture of your business. These intangibles create the very foundation of your practice, and should be given as much attention as the hard concepts and skills.

As a healthcare provider, strategic planning includes your practice purpose, mission, vision, values, goals, and culture. But it doesn't stop there. It should also include a crystal-clear, written description of your ideal patient. Your ideal patient is one who fits perfectly into your practice. You know the one, when you see her name on the schedule your day gets a little brighter, and you wish all your patients were just like her. Imagine how different your days would be if you had an entire practice filled with perfect patients.

Discover Your Ideal Patient

How do you recognize your ideal patient? You can start by brainstorming the following questions and writing down your answers:

1. What personality characteristics or traits do your favorite patients share? (If you're just starting out, think about the characteristics of your favorite people.) For example, are they energetic, outgoing, intelligent, calm, stressed, happy, funny, serious, shy, open-minded, etc?
2. What demographics best describe your practice? (Consider things like age, income, education, etc.) Your ideal patient demographics need to make sense when viewed in the context of your location. For example, if your ideal patient makes more than \$100,000 a year, but you live in a rural area with an average income of \$50,000, do you see the mismatch?
3. Who can benefit the most from the products and/or services your office provides? For example, if your office caters to a geriatric population, having pediatric services might not be the best fit. Another way to look at this is to consider who (i.e.: what populations of people) you love to work with. Do you like working with athletes, pregnant moms and families, the elderly, or those needing physical rehabilitation?
4. What values are important to you and should be reflected in your patients? (For example, if your practice is committed to wellness, your ideal clients should also value wellness.)

Here's a general example of an ideal patient description from one wellness office: "Our ideal client appreciates the efforts of our office, understands the idea of real health and wellness, and is committed to achieving their health goals." Developing a detailed description of your ideal patient may take time and multiple revisions. Keep at it until you're satisfied your written summary accurately

reflects this person.

What Next?

Once you're clear on the specific characteristics of your ideal patient, you'll be amazed at how many of them find their way to your doors.

1. Type up your description and make sure your staff understands it.
2. Memorize your description and ask your staff to do the same.
3. Print a nicely designed copy to hang in your office for everyone to see. Doing so not only helps current patients feel good about themselves, it can also encourage them to refer ideal patients to your practice.
4. Build marketing activities and events focused on attracting more ideal patients to your practice.

How Can I Market?

Once you've written and internalized your ideal patient description and you know exactly who you want to work with, go after them! Market your practice in a way that appeals to your perfect patient. But how do you know what events and activities will appeal to them? You can guess. You can spend time and money trying to figure it out using trial-and-error. Or you can simply ask. Here are some tips and thoughts to consider when asking your ideal patients about marketing.

Tip #1: Decide how to obtain feedback. Will you use an informal questionnaire in the office (written or verbal), a questionnaire mailed to patient's homes, or a social media survey? There are benefits to each, and you'll have to determine which one - or combination of them - will best suit your needs.

Tip #2: Who will you ask? Will you ask current patients, past patients, people in your community who aren't yet patients, or your peers? They may all have valuable feedback for you.

Tip #3: Make it easy! Make it easy for people to give you feedback. Keep it short, and consider making it anonymous if possible.

Tip #4: What will you ask? Be careful here. You'll want to gather as much relevant information in as few questions as possible. You might ask patients what events or activities they participated in during the past year. (Give them a list of past events they can check or circle to make it easy.) Then ask which ones they liked, which ones they didn't like, and why. In addition, you might ask them how they prefer to be informed of upcoming events (newsletter, email, social media, etc.).

Tip #5: Ask for suggestions. As a final question, ask patients if they have an idea for an event or activity they'd like to see at your office. Perhaps offer a small incentive, such as a discount on a retail product or service or a free logoed item, to encourage people to share their ideas.

Tip #6: Put the information to use. Once you've gotten information about what events and activities appeal to your ideal patient, review the feedback and see what makes sense for your practice. Incorporate appropriate ideas into your marketing strategy and watch new perfect patients roll in.

Taking the time to write out your ideal patient description can provide clarity and certainty about your practice. You can then use that information in your marketing to attract more of your ideal patients. When you know who you are and who you want to work with, you'll be an unstoppable force in your community.

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