



GROW YOUR CLINIC

Growing Your Virtual Practice Transcends COVID

Katie Pedrick, MAOM, LAc

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the look and feel of many acupuncture clinics. Once-bustling waiting rooms have sat empty while patients waited outside for their temperature checks, patient volume reduced to facilitate cleaning and spacing, and, increasingly, acupuncturists have been offering their services online. Even as vaccinations become more common and we begin to get "back to normal," it's time to consider which of these changes may be worth keeping permanently.

You're Not Abandoning in-Person Treatment; You're Supplementing It

Hands-on, in-person treatment is the heart of what makes acupuncture the powerful medicine we know and love. There is no substitute for in-person tactile skills, but online treatments may be here to stay. Virtual appointments are a natural choice when prescribing herbs and coaching patients. For your acupuncture patients, these appointments provide an opportunity to refocus on how they must be active participants in their health. Rather than simply lying back and receiving treatment, they are now giving that care to themselves. It is the perfect opportunity to highlight the parallel of how their choices and actions can create either balance or imbalance in their body.



For many patients, virtual treatments may be best used as a complement to in-person acupuncture. Providing more options for treatment makes it easier for patients to comply with their treatment plans and see results, especially through the summer travel season. For your clinic, virtual appointments expand revenue capacity and allow you to work from anywhere with little (or no) additional overhead. Growing any practice takes time and patience, but a few tips and strategies can make the process easier.

Virtual Workstation

Whether working from an office space in your clinic or a vacation rental in Bali, set aside a designated neutral and professional setting to conduct your appointments. Patients will draw conclusions about you from what they can see on screen, just as they would from the surroundings you create in the office. Ensuring there is no visible clutter or mess creates a professional setting where they can focus on your words.

If your sessions involve acupressure or press tacks, create space around your workstation to move freely and access your own ankles and feet within view of the camera.

Treatment Kits

A few days in advance of a virtual appointment, ship a home treatment kit to each patient. The exact contents of the kit will be different depending on the patient's primary complaint and what you know of their presentation, but common components include press tacks, moxa, *gua sha* spoons, magnets and ear seeds. To save on shipping charges, require that patients book a certain number of virtual

sessions in a row, and ship the appropriate supplies to complete their series of treatments at once.

This kit is the only physical representation of your brand your patient will have, so be mindful of the presentation and unboxing experience. Packing in tissue paper and/or sealing with a branded sticker are nice touches that add very little to the cost.

Strategies for Treatment

Virtual treatments may require you to get creative in your treatment strategies, as typical needles have not been considered a practical or safe option during the pandemic, and patients' thumbs will fall off if you ask them to do acupressure on 10 separate acupuncture points. Be succinct in your point protocols. I like to employ Korean 4 needle technique with press tacks during the session itself; and then instruct patients in acupressure they should utilize daily between sessions.

This is also a great moment to incorporate the full range of TCM skills and help them to see how varied our medicine is! Add in herbs, supplements, guided meditations, and even *feng shui* advice if it feels appropriate.

Ongoing Revenue

If you are licensed to do so and feel confident, be robust in your supplement and herbal recommendations. Many supply companies now offer affiliate links and drop-shipping services for everything from vitamins and herbs to at-home lab testing. Many will also allow patients to set up recurring orders with automatic ship dates.

These services are incredibly convenient for both patients and you, allowing them to never run out of supplies, and you to have a passive income stream.

Following a virtual treatment, follow up with the patient via email to recap your verbal recommendations to them. Embed your affiliate links in the recommendation recap, allowing them to easily click to purchase.

If virtual appointments are not already part of your clinic's offering, it's time to give them a try! Include a booking link in your next newsletter and join the working-from-home revolution.

JULY 2021