Does Failing To Promote Your Practice Harm Patients?

By not promoting and advertising your practice, you’re withholding excellent care and expertise from patients. Here are some ways to correct that injustice.

The subject of medical practice and advertising has a long, complicated history. The American Medical Association prohibited physician advertising at one point, then recanted that position.

Though the tide is clearly shifting toward the general approval of physician marketing and promotion, it’s still a touchy subject in many circles. Even in my medical school days less than 20 years ago, I remember a neurosurgeon who decried advertising among physicians, going so far as to imply that just “being a good doctor” was enough to bring a tidal wave of new patients in your door. If you’re like me, you see examples of physician marketing everywhere, in almost every form imaginable. From billboards to mini-magazines for busy moms, to TV commercials and online banner ads, individual doctors and their employers are not shy about promoting their services.

The most persuasive reason to promote your practice

Most medical communities are small — you know who’s in trouble and who’s conscientious, and who’s teetering on the edge of quackery. This knowledge then colors how we see these physicians advertising themselves in public.

Imagine flipping through the local glossy metropolitan society page magazine in your town and seeing ads from a local doctor you know is not the most ethical character. Seeing those ads probably burns you up! Instead of getting red in the face, I suggest you channel that energy differently.

Resolve to get your message out and promote the good work you are doing for patients.

Even if it’s a small ad that points people to a free educational download or approaching a local magazine about a feature story on you, start getting your feet wet and promoting your practice in the local community.

Your obligation as an excellent physician

Think about it this way: If you know deep down that you are the best at what you do, spend the most energy and time with your patients, provide excellent service and myriad other benefits for patients, why are you keeping it a secret? Don’t rely on word of mouth or some kind of mystical osmotic process to bring patients in the door. The longer you sit around waiting, the more patients are streaming through the doors of the local quack or mediocre doctor who’s competing with you. Instead of reacting and beating up on local practitioners who promote themselves and their mediocrity, start adopting their effective techniques to get the word out about what you do. I’d go so far to say it’s your obligation.

Safe ways of promoting your practice

If you want more and better patients in your office, it’s time to start getting comfortable with the general excellence of what you do. In fact, if you deliver sub-par service and your patients don’t get well, it’s unethical to promote yourself and you should stay in the shadows with the others.

There are safe ways to promote your practice that serve as good starting points:

• Educating the public
• Involvement in community outreach and service projects
• Educating your own patients
• Educating the nation and the world with online outlets and media

Here are three examples of ideas for promoting your work locally:

• If you work for a hospital, start asking how you can be involved in community education outreach
• If you’re in private practice, find out what local health TV shows exist and if you can make an appearance
• If you’re in an academic setting, offer to be a contact person for local media — universities are usually the first target reporters look to when searching for expert comments on stories
These don’t require your face to be on a billboard or make you feel like a pretentious state fair midway salesman. Start with education. Become known as the physician who informs and shares information with the community.

Most secrets to success in medical practice involve getting over our own mindset errors — realizing that we do go the extra mile for patients and over-deliver. You know this, now put that knowledge to good and profitable use. Get your message out so you can rescue patients from certain mediocrity. Tell me what you think in the comments — am I going too far to say that patients are harmed by a lack of advertising and promotion by quality physicians?

Find out more about C. Noel Henley and our other Practice Notes bloggers.

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