



Increasing Your Referrals Through Physician Outreach

By Luke Hinzmann

As audiologists, one of the greatest business challenges is generating a stream of new patients to walk into our offices. There are many ways that we do this, including our marketing plans and exploring different mediums of advertising. One of the most important, effective, and inexpensive means to get these patients through our doors is through referrals. The act of a personal and specific referral often carries more weight than the mass of advertisements that a patient is exposed to on a daily basis. Who can be a positive referral source for your practice? How can you reach this referral source? Are the million dollar questions.

The most important referral source is another medical professional. This should not devalue the trust your patients demonstrate when referring their friends and family. The referrals from existing patients reflect satisfaction and trust in your skills, while the referrals from other medical providers demonstrate trust in your abilities with high-yield return. With a typical-sized medical practice having thousands of patients, the impact has great potential. The family doctor is not only trusted but is in a position to make referrals to a variety of allied health professionals on a regular basis. The family physician cares about the overall health of each patient, hearing health care

included, and wants to send each patient to an establishment that provides high-quality care. The challenge is seeking opportunities to convince the family physician that you will take the highest care of everyone that enters your office. What is the best way to persuade these physicians to refer their patients to you for their hearing needs?

It starts with simple interactions. Stopping by the office to introduce yourself as a medical professional is one key step to possibly meeting with the physicians. Due to the busy nature of medical practices, it can be difficult to actually meet the physicians face-to-face and have any amount of time to converse.

But when you introduce yourself as another medical professional, the receptionist may be more likely to go out of his or her way to help you. Most of these offices are familiar with sales representatives making unscheduled visits to sell products. Once you have established that your intention is not to monopolize time with a sales visit, you are much more likely to actually get direct physician interaction. Another important step is to ask if the doctor is available for a few minutes. Many times we assume they are too busy, but the question should be asked. If a personal visit is not possible, drop off information for each doctor individually addressed. Personalizing this will also increase your odds that this material is actually read. The materials that you drop off to the physicians can be simple marketing information, highlighting you, your practice, and how you can benefit their patients.

The most important thing to ask while on this visit is if the physicians would be able to set up a time to meet with you. Based on the time of the visit, providing breakfast or lunch is appreciated. This is a great opportunity for you to meet these physicians and explain the value of referring their patients to you for hearing-health-care-related concerns. Planning this meeting over a meal provides the opportunity to discuss your practice in depth and highlight differences and advantages over other audiology and hearing aid businesses in the area. Sell only yourself and your services over your competitor, not specific products. Be available to answer any questions that the physicians might have; there are often many questions. If you know that your office is better than your competitors, simply explain why that is and the benefit to their patients. Take advantage of your captive audience.

It may take time to see the positive results from your visits in the form of referrals. Once you receive a referral, promptly respond to the physician. This typically entails a report acknowledging the referral, including follow-up plans, to ensure excellent care for the patient. The next major step in physician marketing is nurturing the relationship with the physicians who provide referrals to your practice. Be consistent with visits, provide personalized materials, and provide prompt responses to the referrals. These are all critical for the long-term relationship.

For more specific information, including suggestions on how to introduce yourself to physicians, ideas and examples of materials to provide, and considerations when discussing your practice to primary-care physicians, visit the Academy Store online and purchase the *Reaching Physicians CD*.

There is something to be said for the personal touch. Introducing yourself and explaining all that you have to offer with a genuine smile and clear information can go a long way in this endeavor. Once you have a physician who consistently looks to your practice for the audiology needs of those patients, you will have a long-lasting and positive referral source. 

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Illustration by Johanna van der Sterre.

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