





A NOTE FROM THE
OFPSA PRESIDENT

FARMERS AND FISHERS — A STORY ON PATIENT RETENTION

by Tracy L. Drumm, OFPSA President

Recently, I asked the manager of a robust practice to share the secret behind their resilient success. With a confident smile she said, “It’s simple, we farm before we fish.” As images of her team with overalls and pitchforks filled my head, she quickly elaborated. “Our concept is to ‘farm’ or nurture and grow our relationship with existing patients before ever “fishing” for new ones.”

Worded in a variety of ways, this concept is one we have all most likely heard but often forget. When looking for an influx in business, many are quick to search for new patients before reaching out to current ones. This can be a costly mistake, not only regarding marketing expenses but also considering patients you might be losing.

Recognizing the need for a strong patient retention program, our Chicago-based practice started using “Smile Reminder” in August 2010. After hearing about this

company at a meeting, we called a few practices that were working with them and received positive feedback. With trusted colleague recommendations we decided to move forward and have been using their services for a year. The program Smile Reminder offers is able to work with your software system to remind patients about their appointments via text messages and email. Beyond eliminating the need for reminder calls to patients, the most enticing feature we found is what they call the “re-care” program. Through text or email, this service offers strategically timed outreach to patients that aren’t proactively calling to schedule their next filler, neurotoxin or laser appointments. To date, 52 patients we had not heard from in a year came back for a treatment based on a re-care reminder. This feature alone has become a huge asset to our practice and a strong addition to our retention plan. In addition to bringing back

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lost patients, we save tremendous resources by not having our reception team on the phone making time consuming reminder calls. In the past 12 months alone, we have had 19,894 appointments confirmed through Smile Reminder.

Yet another retention tool our practice is using through their software is the birthday program. Patients are automatically texted or emailed (based on their preference) a “Happy Birthday from Dr. Dayan” message on the morning of their birthday. We opted to include a “call to action” in these messages with a \$50 practice gift certificate. Of the patients who have received them, 206 have redeemed the gift towards treatments at the practice.

Consider the marketing maxim that it is six to seven times more expensive to gain a new patient than it is to retain one. There are an abundance of solutions to proactively and easily implement a retention plan. You can simply utilize functionality of your existing software, seek services through programs like Smile Reminder or simply designate an employee to be in charge of retention outreach. However you decide to execute these efforts, devising a standard operating procedure for retention will increase profitability from repeat business and offer savings on your marketing expenses.

In today’s high-paced world, offices continue to face changes due to technology, innovation and an unstable economy. Proactively speaking with your existing database on a regular and planned basis will help ensure future practice health.



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