



Practice Focus

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Series 1 The Fundamentals

Session 11 Multiplying Quality Patients

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Hello everyone, and welcome to a very special Practice Focus. You know, every month I say this may be the most important Practice Focus ever, but I will tell you this, I won't say this is the most important one. I will say that this Practice Focus today is something that could be reused again and again and again, every single month, and I would strongly encourage you to keep this one front and center. At least revisit it once a quarter, you could do twice a year, if you lack a little ambition.

So, today's Practice Focus is going to talk really about, and emphasize, the idea of **multiplying our quality patients**. The concept of referrals, which I hesitate to even use that word, referrals, because people think of silly things, they think of asking patients, "Do you know anybody who you would like to refer to us?" They think of things like a sign in the operatory that says, "The best compliment you can give is sending us your friends and family." All of those things are fine, there's nothing wrong with any of that, but they're not really what we would call strategies. Those are really referrals by accident.

So, today what I want to share with you are ways to drive new patient growth, which we have to have. We have to have new patient growth. Now, the number of the patients is going to vary from every single practice. **It's not always "more is better."** Of course not. We want to emphasize quality, and that is why this topic is so powerful, and I really love talking about it because there's no better way to increase the overall growth of your practice from a new patient's standpoint than to put an emphasis directly on referrals.

Referrals are the secret to growth in dentistry because of three reasons.

First is that any time somebody refers to you, you are gaining immediate implied trust. Now, doesn't mean that you can slack off and not do a good job, I mean you still have to pay attention and provide a great experience to these people, but it absolutely gives you a leg up. It allows you to start with a conversation with a patient where if someone else trusted you, then they are much more apt to trust you too. So, it really gives us a great acceleration of the most important aspect of case acceptance, which is trust.

Now, the second reason is that these patients are basically already convinced that they are going to move forward with some dentistry. You know, people really don't go to a car lot just looking, okay, they are only there because they want something. Now, they may very well just look, but nobody who is not interested in a car at all ever goes. Same thing going to the store. If you go looking for shoes or purses or dresses, you may not need one, you may have an idea that you're just gonna go peruse, but if you didn't have an inclination about this item that you wish to purchase you would never waste your time in the store.

So, the reason why referrals already show up convinced is because if you're talking to somebody about it, you're not just going to casually over coffee say, "So you know what I've been thinking, I'd really like to tell you about my dentist." Nobody does that. So, the only way referral conversation ever happens is that your patient provides a story, an explanation, an example, they tell someone else what they've had done at your office. So, it's initiated by this person or it's another person requesting information, "Do you know anybody who ... I've been thinking about ... Do you go to ...?" So, you understand that normally on the phone we are fighting the battle of convincing somebody to come in. But with a referral, that convincing has already been done. Now, you've got to take it to the next level, but it's important that you understand that.

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The third reason, of course is my favorite, and this is what I call friendly obligation. Friendly obligation is a very psychological thing. It's a very deep and powerful thing. And it's something that, quite frankly, you don't have to do anything with, it already comes with the territory.

The friendly obligation says that if a friend told me something, and I said I'm going to do it, then I don't want to come back to that friend and be asked the question, "Did you? How was it? What happened? How'd it go?" And not have an answer. So, I am obligated now, if my friend tells me, "Go try this restaurant," or "You should really go to this store," or "I'd really like for you to talk to my insurance agent." It doesn't matter. That friend, they're gonna come back the next time they see me, and they're going to say, "So, what'd you think about so-and-so?" And if I don't have an answer, I feel like I've disrespected that friend. They will feel a little put off even if they say they're not, they will feel a little put off. Okay, so, that is what we call friendly obligation.

Now, when you take trust, when you take the convincing, and you take the obligatory factors, and you bring all those things together, you get something very magical. You see, the big problem is that we take referrals for granted or we do it in a way that seems like we're begging for business. The art and strategy of doing this is something that embraces these three key factors, and it allows us to really create growth. If you want to make your life easier, a lot easier, and you want to hit your bonuses in bigger and bigger ways, then you want to stack the deck in your favor and this is the way to do it.

There are two giant-sized benefits to focusing on referrals. The first one is when you create a referral culture, you also incubate better case acceptance. Now, this works on both sides of the fence. If you have a referral culture internally, your patients are more apt to feel like family at your practice, and of course, therefore, they don't want to let you down.

Secondly, when we cultivate referrals, the trust, the convincing, the obligation, it leads to new patients who are more apt to accept treatment for those three very reasons.

Now, the second side benefit is that when you get more referrals, they come pre-trained to refer. So, understand this cycle. Patients say yes to dentistry, you do something that changes their life, they go and tell other people about it, those other people come into your practice, they have trust, they've been pre-convinced, they have an obligation to say yes, you now get case acceptance on those people, they go back and tell their friends what happened, everybody's happy. Now, you've got two people who go tell two more people. Now, you get this compounding effect because if I tell a friend who comes into your office and has a great benefit, I'm more apt to tell another friend. And if my friend comes in and has a great experience, they're apt to tell somebody else because they came through a referral also. This is why it's so powerful.

So, for this month, let's focus on **the four key cornerstones of referrals.** I'm going to hit you with these fast, I want to leave you with as much time to talk about them. They're really, really, very straight forward:

1. The first one is what I call incorporating referrals into the patient experience. Now, this happens in really, three kinds of interesting ways.

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- a) The first one is in the new patients. New patient experience, you want to begin on the phone call, encouraging them to bring somebody with them. I say, “You know, Mrs. Jones, we have found that our patients just love bringing a family member with them on their first visit. Since I know you’re married, I figure you’d probably want to bring your spouse, but you can bring whoever you want. Having somebody of yours also meeting the doctor, and of course, talking to your health and your goals and objectives, it’s always nice to have another set of ears. Is there somebody who you’d like to include with you next week when you come in?” Now, you can ask that question in many different ways, the best way to ask that question is to customize the way you ask it based on the conversation you’re having on the phone. You’re not asking them to bring somebody in for an exam, you’re just asking them to bring somebody in with them to accompany them.
- b) The next aspect of the patient experience is, of course, upon the exit. So, you know with your patients, we like to focus on creating a gifting strategy, which we’ve talked about many times. So, the best time to gift is before they come in, before they pay, after they complete their treatment, and any time they refer. You know that already. But there’s another very important aspect of this. We often give away the idea of referring to us, so we say, “Refer us patients.” But that really devalues everything you’ve worked for. We want to take your referrals, and we want to turn it into a privilege.

Turning it into a privilege to refer, instantly makes it more valuable. By doing this, we’re able to say to the patient, “We’d like to give you a very special gift. This gift is something we believe is the best thing we could possibly give. We know there are people out there who you love and care about, and we’d like to give you a special certificate here that you can utilize for any person within thirty days. Obviously, it has a deadline because we can only see so many people, and you know we don’t take all patients, so we trust in you to invite somebody who is really going to value and appreciate and benefit from what we do here. So, here’s the special certificate for five hundred dollars, four hundred dollars, for a free exam, for a free cleaning, for whatever.”

I do not like discounting, but if you’re discounting to strangers, you’re losing the battle. But if you’re discounting strategically to patients who you already know are of great quality, then it’s very smart. I don’t care how you do it, you can make up whatever you want. The point is to give your patients something of value. A ticket that says, “Get out of jail for free,” or “Here’s the referral pass that you can invite somebody in for ten dollars off,” or something, you know, it has to be something meaningful. Like I said, a certificate or something like that.

Now, in addition to this, with the new patient experience ... I’m sorry, the patient experience, not new patients, so that’s kind of the new patient side, there’s two things.

You can also incorporate spouses into treatment conferences, and you can pull referrals out of that from getting the spouse involved. It’s really so important that the spouse involved, not just for the money, but because you want to turn it into treatment, and the best way to get great case acceptance is to have the whole family a part of your practice.

Now, for regular patients I like to do what I call a **family audit**, so with your chart reviews, you’re double-checking, making sure that every family member is up to date on their exams, they’re active in hygiene, there’s no unscheduled treatment possible.

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It takes a little more time, but really you should be looking at, throughout your day, your column of patients, and you want to make sure that you have checked to see if there are any family opportunities.

The other thing you can do is understand that you can refer existing patients to themselves. So, if an existing patient has been in for a long time, they got a lot of treatment in their mouth, or they're interested in a specialty thing: TMJ, sleep, ortho, whatever, you can slip them back into a new patient experience, and it's just like a new patient.

- c) The last part of the patient experience is to make sure that everybody, everybody is asking patients, "Is there anyone else in your family who we should be seeing that we're not? Is there anyone else who I need to schedule an appointment for today?" So, when you schedule somebody for hygiene, you also want to ask them about their family members. This is important thing you must do.

Now, this is all tied in to the patient experience. And by the way, I'm sure you can come up with many other examples.

2. The next part is what I call growing the practice through referrals from the inside out. Now, the inside out is what I call the center of influence strategy. The center of influence strategy means that if there are any patients in your practice today who have influence over others, you should be using them to create what we call healthcare partnerships.

Now, this can be - and I'll give you my list - any patients who are doctors, any patients who are married to doctors, any patients who are kids of doctors, any patients who work for doctors. Any of these people become great sources for you to work backwards. Obviously, healthcare professionals are usually the best because they're incorporating the same conversations that you're having, they're having it different ways with their existing patient base. What you'd want to do is not go and say, "Will you send us your patients?" You want to go and say, "Hey, we're taking care of you, who's taking care of all your employees? Who's taking care of all your team members?" We want to get all the team members in first, and then the patients will follow.

You also look at people - patients who are teachers or administrators or managers or HR professionals or executives or own a business. You can look at people who are doing anything related to fitness or beauty. It really really doesn't matter, almost every patient has some connection. It could be a church group, it could be anything that would allow you the opportunity to say, "Hey, we want to serve the people who you are serving or who are working with you or your coworkers." So, I want you to be outside the box, creative thinking about the patients in your practice that you can expand your relationship from just taking care of them to bridging that gap and getting into their circle of influence.

Now, we could take this a step further and do something very special. This is a very advanced strategy. This is what I call the reverse referral. The reverse referral is about getting the patient to refer us to their doctors. And the way you do that is you have a list of physicians or healthcare professionals that every patient fills out, so you know who's taking care of them, and then you simply provide a referral letter or a professional medical letter back to these people, and you tell them you have a patient in common.

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Based on having a patient in common, you would like to update them about their care, plus you'd love to learn a little more about what they do, so that you can be a good advocate for them in your practice. That's it. So, if you get a patient today that has a chiropractor, nutritionist, a primary physician that you've never met before, you send a letter, you put lines in the water, and you let people come to you. There are so many ways to expand that on the referrals side.

3. The next cornerstone of referrals is the outside-in approach. Now, this is about the community. **The community basis is really doing the same concept internally and doing it outside the office.** So, you start by all the business around you. You start by people who are already referring patients. You start by any great sources of commonalities. If you're doing small makeovers, you go to cosmetic surgeons. If you're doing pain and sleep, you go to sleep centers, or you go to EMTs. If you're doing ortho for kids, you can go to day cares, you can go to kid centers, tutoring centers, schools, you know, you just simply take your focus, your interest ... You're doing dentures and implants, you can go to assisted living, you could go to ... Nursing homes these days have a wide spectrum of things available. You can go to retirement communities. So many, so many things.

So, you look at the outside in approach, you think who should be referring these patients, where do the patients we want exist, gather, patronage, go to, do business with, et cetera. Then, you say what can we do to be of service to these people. So, now you create this flowing channel back. Every one of you goes to businesses, has kids in day cares, in schools. You go to the beauty salon, you go to the skin place, you go to the nail place, you go to the fitness center, you go to the restaurants, you all have people who you could be branching out and creating this flow up into your practice from the outside in approach.

4. The last one I'm going to touch on, which is the fourth cornerstone, it really goes to all of these, so this is a big, big, broad statement, and that's what I call the **referrals by education.** Referrals by education are most usually done through events. They're doing little patient appreciation nights, they're doing content nights, or seminar nights, but it's also doing lunch and learns in other offices or other facilities. It could be doing community events in a library. It could be educating your patients through video testimonials. My favorite strategy is to do one video testimonial a week about a specific patient with a specific problem, email that out to your patient database.

Now, if you're using my good friends at My Dental Agency, who are the best of the best in the industry, they do all this for you. They do education approach for you, and they take and infiltrate out into your patient base and into your community through social media, through email marketing, through the internet. Now, they are great people, so if you don't have the information about them, you can just reach out to one of us, and my team will connect you. My Dental Agency, I like them because they guarantee what they do, and they provide this exact referral approach. They believe in my philosophies of retention, relationships, referrals being the key to everything. So, they will embrace the education part. For yourselves, you need to understand education can be writing articles for the posting of social medias, sending emails out, doing newsletters, doing so many so many other things. So, you want to ask yourself, what are we doing to educate in order to get referrals?

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Now, your homework is to take each of these four and brainstorm together things you can do to increase referrals that you aren't doing right now or that you've never tried before.

Then, I want you to divide and conquer, and get every team member involved. Rest assured, it is each and every team member's responsibility to participate in this and contribute to growth of the practice through referrals.

Please, set a goal and start tracking it every day, set some rewards and victories for yourselves for achieving them. Begin by asking yourselves who you know that isn't a patient here that should be. What businesses you are a customer at that can benefit from a healthcare partnership with your practice. What other ideas do you have about this. Make your list, and go to work. That's two very important action plans in one this month.

The first four categories, and then your own personal contribution. Please, I want you to get to it, and have fun. Remember, you should circle back to this every quarter, you'll be amazed, truly amazed at what will happen when you do that. Nothing should be more fun than promoting what you do and being proud of your practice. Take your referrals, your initiatives, and your strategies to the next level.

Master these four aspects. There are so many great details within each and every one of these cornerstones. Go back and listen, revisit this frequently. Most of all, put sustainable, predictable, consistent systems in place to cultivate out your referrals. I have given you many easy things to do today, free things that cost you nothing. I've given you more advanced strategies that will say, "Hey, we'll see what you do, what you're willing to make happen."

Thank you very much, let's go! If you need something let me know, this is going to be magical for you. Remember the power of just one patient. If you get one or two or three referrals a month, more than you have before, they're worth ten times more than anybody else. If you do this right, you can replace all the patients you don't want with the patients you do want by mastering this referral structure. Thank you very much. I can't wait to hear your success stories. Please, it's up to you to make the magic happen.