

**GYL KASEWURM,
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BEST-BUSINESS
ENHANCEMENT STRATEGIES
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Marketing Scene

It's All About Relationships

The term “relationship marketing” refers to building solid relationships with patients that will last for a lifetime. The goal of relationship marketing is not unlike the one that you have for family or good friends. It's not about having a “buddy-buddy” relationship with patients and colleagues, but rather it's about creating a bond that will last a lifetime. Retaining patients and referral sources means keeping them informed and connected with you or your organization. If you don't, they will slip away and eventually no longer be your patients, just as friends don't stay friends if you don't communicate and show interest in them.

Despite the goal of developing “patients for life,” many audiologists only communicate with their patients when they want to inform them of new technologies. I liken this to only inviting family and friends for events associated with gift giving. So, if you want to develop a long-time, meaningful relationship with someone, what should you do?

Take time to get acquainted - When a new patient visits your practice or organization for the first time, make them feel welcome. Take some time to introduce them to the staff and show them the facility before you start testing. Let them know that you are pleased they chose your facility for their hearing healthcare. Patients have a choice of providers so thank them for choosing YOU. If your facility serves refreshments, ask the patient and their guest if they would like a cup of coffee or water and some cookies while you gather some information.

Give them your undivided attention – During the initial interview, allow the patient time to share their story and make notes of the key points so you will remember them during future visits. Be a good listener and make sure you have ample time scheduled so you don't have to rush. When you are with a patient, that person should be the ONLY thing on your mind. A successful practitioner is usually a busy practitioner, but reports and walk-in patients should never get in the way of devoting your full attention to a patient who has scheduled an appointment with you.

Repeatedly share information – Once the patient has left your office, you should send information on a regular basis. A good first step is to send every new patient a thank you note. Let the patient

know how much you enjoyed working with them and that you look forward to an ongoing relationship. It's great to share the most recent product developments but make sure this isn't the ONLY information you share with patients. Include updates on the staff and the educational progress they have made. Think about sharing information via email and/or printed newsletters. Postcards are also great ways to send brief messages to patients.

Show them you care – It's paramount that you notice when patients fail to come in for a long period of time, and this will require a means of tracking patient visits. This type of data will enable you to follow and actually predict patient behavior. When a long-term patient fails to visit your office, it becomes obvious that his or her relationship with you has changed. You need to let the patient know that you recognize their absence and that you are concerned. If you only call a patient when you want them to buy something, they may feel like you only care about selling them something.

Recognize their accomplishments – Patients appreciate it when you remember their birthdays, special anniversaries, or significant events in their lives like the birth of a child or grandchild or a job promotion. Think how special you feel when a friend sends you a card out of the blue. Patients have similar feelings. Remember to acknowledge the death of a patient by sending the family a sympathy card.

Since patients are living longer and acquiring hearing loss at younger ages, the importance of developing lifetime relationships with patients is becoming more valuable to a business. When you want to form a lifetime relationship with a patient, go the extra mile to make them feel welcome and take every opportunity you can to make them feel special. Treat every patient as if they are a special friend that you would hate to lose. Live by the motto, “Love your patients and the money will follow.” (Nagen) 🗣️

References

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