

Instructions for Marketing with “For Your Information”

The series of “For Your Information” pages is designed for an extremely strong and profitable internal marketing program if you use it correctly.

The foremost and greatest return on investment you can have for marketing your practice is through internal marketing - getting referrals from existing clients. The most effective and productive way to do this is to simply ask your patients for them. Unfortunately this is where most doctors and staff fail. They don't ask effectively or often enough. After all, if the patient comes in for 35 visits over 6 months shouldn't you keep asking 35 times on the chance they might meet someone who can use your services (or at least to get you off their back for continually asking)? Do you fear antagonizing a patient by continually asking for referrals? Do you remember who you've asked at least 4 times in the past? Do the patients even know what you do besides what they personally have as their individual health problem?

Think about this for a minute. You've just had a patient tell you how much better they are feeling due to your care. Now's the time to ask so you say, “I'm glad to hear that. By the way, Do you know anyone else we can help?” At this point the patient says, “No. I can't think of anyone.” so you stop asking in the future. What really happened? The patient thought, ‘I know you are good with my particular problem but I don't know anyone else with my particular problem.’ And since you've now asked them once you're reluctant to ask them again for fear of appearing demanding or “money hungry” or desperate. So asking for referrals doesn't work for you and most doctors for this same reason.

Now let's turn things around a little. If you could take the time to educate a patient on a different condition you effectively treat and then ask them if they know anyone with THAT condition isn't that more specific? Doesn't it give you a greater chance of asking more often for specific conditions instead of generic new patients? Does the patient feel antagonized for continually asking the same question over and over again? Unfortunately you and your staff don't have the time to educate each patient on all the things you treat and then ask for referrals. In addition, you find it impossible to track what you've discussed with who. That's what these “For Your Information” pages are for.

First of all, set the page up properly. DO NOT PUT YOUR BIG BOLD LETTERHEAD AT THE TOP!! If you do, it subconsciously says, “I'm this great and wonderful person and I'm going to tell you something.” On the other hand, if you put the title at the top in a pleasing color (we use lime green), then place the text, then, at the bottom, put a smaller version of your letterhead, it subconsciously says, “This is important information and we're the nice people who are giving it to you.”

Look at the sentence at the bottom of each page. “Who do you know who could use our help?” This question, after they've read the page, now really means “Who do you know ***with this condition*** who could use our help?” This now is a different question than the one asked after their reading the previous visit's page. It's not the same question you ask every visit for getting referrals yet it's the same words again and again but the context is different.

Now, how do you use this system. It's based on simplicity, duplication of effort, patient education and patient control. This last “control” is something some doctors have problems with. They let patients dictate how they want the doctor and staff to treat them as a customer instead of the doctor taking control and directing the patient to do what he or she wants the patient to do.

Make up 3 (or if you have a very busy practice up to 5) copies of each “FYI” page. Create a calendar (put it in your appointment book) to assign a specific page for Monday, the next one for Wednesday and the next one for Friday. Continue this process until they are used up and you start over again. They will last

about 4 months before starting over again. This does several important things. Why every other day? Because the vast majority of patient are scheduled 3, 2 or 1 day a week. Only in the very beginning of care do many doctors schedule daily visits. Therefore by changing the page every other day you will catch each patient as they come in with a different page than one they've seen previously.

First, it creates a topic of discussion for ALL the staff with every patient that day and the next. Second, it educates your patients to a much broader spectrum of what you treat than any stack of brochures could ever hope to cover AND does it without your having to take any time with each patient. Third, It gives you a reason to comfortably ask for a direct referral on the selected topic from each patient on each visit. Fourth, your staff can do it in as little as 30 seconds at the front desk before you even see the patient and you can follow up during the appointment, if you have the time with the patient, by bringing up the daily topic with a little extra information, previous patient's (anonymous) case history, and ask again for a referral by simply restating the closing question on the page, "Who do you know who could use our help?"

Here's where the patient control comes in. As each and every patient signs in have your front desk person simple give one of the sheets (place them in plastic sheet protectors) to the patient and say, "The doctor wants you to read this before he (or she) sees you today. Please bring it back up here and let me know when you've finished it so I can get you in." (Don't let the patient take it home. It's a wasted effort. They will want to put it away and read it later which will never happen.) It is a rare case when a patient will say, "No, I don't want to do what the doctor wants me to do! I want to see him right now. I don't care if it's only one page long. It will take a whole 2 minutes of my time which is too precious to waste on such nonsense." Do you really think that will happen? Of course not. The patient will take it, read it and return to the front desk. As soon as they do the front desk person simple reads the question at the bottom, "Who do you know who could use our help?" and it's done.

This is the most effective internal marketing system you will ever find. Nothing, beats it because you're educating the patient and asking a different question on each and every visit without getting annoying. Brochures don't match it. They sit unread except for a few people and don't cover everything you treat. Workshops don't work because patients don't have time for them and they only cover a small portion of what you do one time. Direct mail to your patients cost you time and money. So do phone calls and those are usually to patients who are done and gone. Contest may be more fun but most patients really don't participate and it misses the expansion of your conditions of treatment generated through education.

A few extra little benefit - Each visit has a designated topic. That means you don't have to worry about having the same conversation over and over again. (What did you talk to this patient about last time?) It keeps you and your staff focused. You will find you don't have to think of what to say after the first few patients. Your mouth will work automatically while you can let your awareness concentrate on the patient's presentation. It helps bring in new kinds of conditions to treat so you don't get bored to death with every patient having the same thing.