



Earn What You Deserve and Get Your Nights and Weekends Back

It's all about being pro-active and building relationships.

BY REM JACKSON

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Don't worry about the world coming to an end today, it's already tomorrow in Australia.

—Charles Schultz

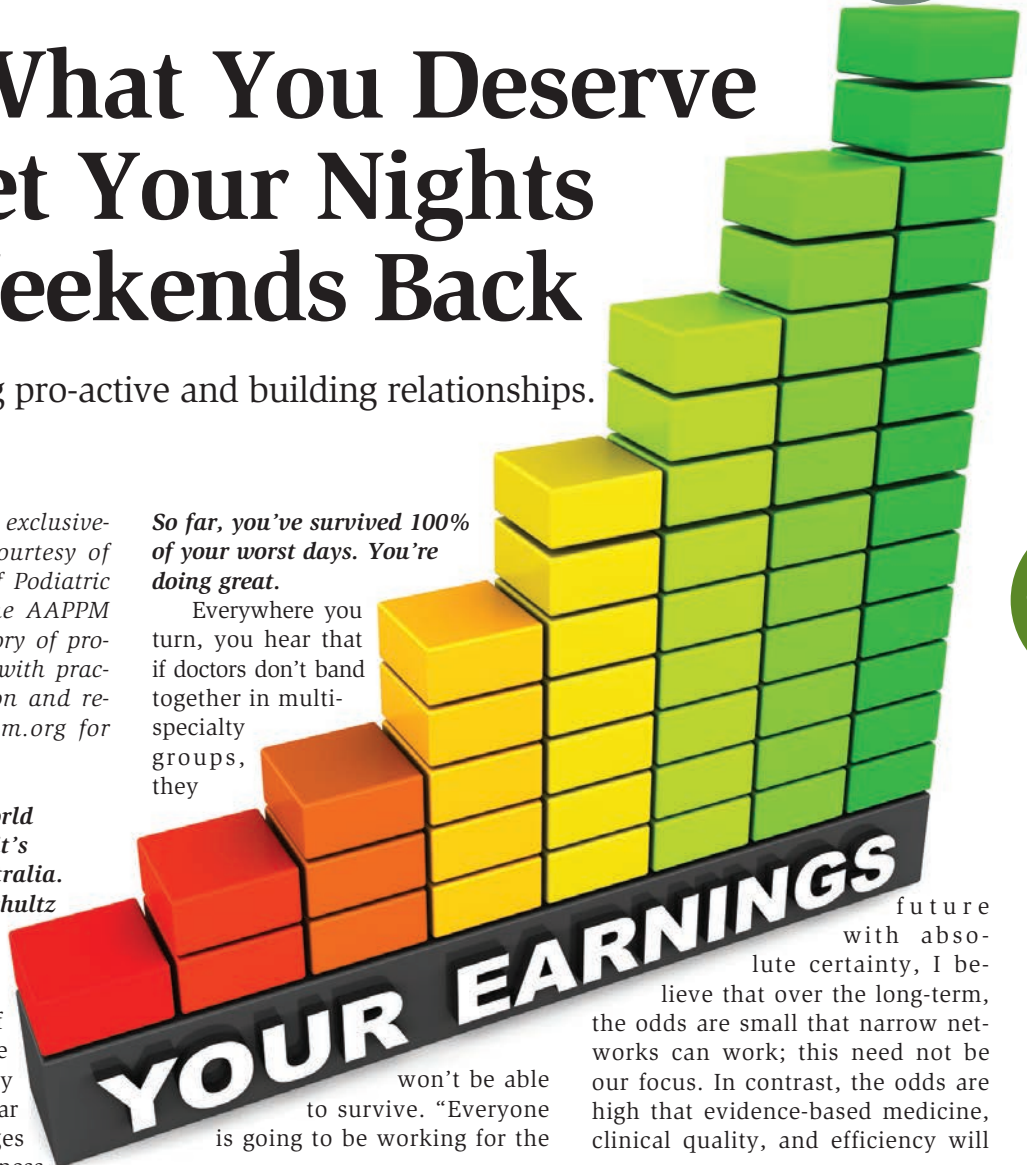
Owning and operating a podiatry practice is no more or less difficult than owning any other kind of business. It might feel like it's harder, but that is only because you are so familiar with the specific challenges podiatry faces. Every business has its own challenges that are unique to the market segment of that business. Podiatry is no different. The main challenge facing podiatry (and all medical practices and businesses) is the overbearing regulations imposed by an all-powerful government and greedy payers. There seems to be no "cavalry" that is going to come over the hill to save us and this has caused many to throw up their hands in despair. Seemingly doomed to making less while working harder and spending nights and weekends trying to stay current with the tsunami of paperwork imposed on them, many doctors think this is "just the way it is now."

So far, you've survived 100% of your worst days. You're doing great.

Everywhere you turn, you hear that if doctors don't band together in multi-specialty groups, they

won't be able to survive. "Everyone is going to be working for the

future with absolute certainty, I believe that over the long-term, the odds are small that narrow networks can work; this need not be our focus. In contrast, the odds are high that evidence-based medicine, clinical quality, and efficiency will



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hospital," they say. More "doom and gloom" from so-called experts. The problem with all of this is—it just isn't true. In *Podiatry Management Magazine* (November/December 2015 issue), Dr. Jon Hultman writes: "While we can't predict the

become the norm, and these are what we must be preparing for."

Make no mistake, your cheese has been moved.

Dr. Spencer Johnson and Ken
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Blanchard wrote a great little book in 1998 entitled “Who Moved My Cheese?” It’s a fable about mice living in a maze who go to the same

ble, but enjoyable without impeding on your personal life;

- A choice on your part to positively affect the changes you need to ensure all the “cheese” you desire, however you define it.

you currently doing to market your practice:

- 1) Online?
- 2) To referral sources?
- 3) To your patients?
- 4) To your community?

If your reception room is filled every day with exactly the kind of patients you want to see, you can build your practice to be so profitable that you just won’t care what the government or insurance companies or hospitals do.

spot every day to find their cheese. One day the cheese isn’t there and a great debate ensues over what to do. Some want to continue going to the same place in hopes the cheese will return and they can continue to eat. Others think looking elsewhere for the cheese is the strategy they should pursue.

As you can surmise, one little mouse heads out against all odds and finds even more cheese. The moral of the story is that our worlds are constantly changing and if we are to continue to thrive, we must change as well. In business, as in life, knowledge gained through lifelong learning, combined with an unrelenting positive mental attitude, is always the path to success.

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

—*Maimonides*

If your reception room is filled every day with exactly the kind of patients you want to see, you can build your practice to be so profitable that you just won’t care what the government or insurance companies or hospitals do. Competing with the “Big Gorillas” in your market is going to require several things:

- Practice Marketing that fills your reception room with patients you look forward to treating;
- Practice Management that makes serving an increasingly higher volume of patients not only possi-

Luckily, there is no guesswork about what you can do to build a strong, profitable practice. There is a system to accomplishing this and many of your colleagues are reaping the benefits of these business strategies. As famed management consultant Peter Drucker said, “A bad system will outperform good people with no system 100% of the time.”

Practice Marketing

There are only four places from which new patients can come to your practice:

- The Internet in all its various platforms
- Medical and non-medical referral sources surrounding your practice
- Your own database (or list) of patients, prospective patients, and other people who already know you, like you, and trust you
- Advertising, sponsorships, and other marketing efforts you pursue in your community.

Developing a Marketing Program

The first step in developing a marketing program for your practice that fills your reception room with patients you look forward to seeing is to do a simple review—What are

Give yourself a grade (from zero to 10) in each area: zero means you are doing nothing and ten means you are the best in the country. Try to be a hard grader as you do this (no one should ever rate themselves a ten, you need room to grow). Then ask yourself and your staff what you need to do to be able to rate yourself 2 points higher within three to six months.

Marketing Online

Online marketing is one of the most confusing (yet promising) areas you will be evaluating. There has been a proliferation of marketing companies that have emerged in the last two years claiming to be experts. This is a virtual epidemic in all businesses and professions, not just podiatry. Online marketing is the new “Wild, Wild West” where “snake-oil” salesmen make big claims but accomplish nothing or even damage the online reputation of the practice. Sometimes this

Ask yourself what you are doing to market your practice?

happens, not because the company is intentionally misleading; it can happen because they are not staying current with the rapidly changing nature of Internet marketing.

Doctors must use their own personal network of trusted colleagues or associations to find out whom they should be working with for their online marketing. Find colleagues who are truly doing their online marketing well and ask them how they are getting this work done.

One important final point here is that you can no longer do this yourself. Marketing online has as much of an information technology (IT) component to it as it does content.

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It takes resources to truly stay current with what the search engines are doing to ensure the integrity of the search results they are delivering to

ships with medical and non-medical referral sources is the forgotten treasure trove of many practices. All new practitioners make a point of introducing themselves to their local potential referral sources and

including those with your spouse and children, will wither on the vine if you don't nurture and care for it. The same thing is true for referral sources. One of two things are happening to your referral sources if you don't take care of the relationship: they either begin to forget about you, or they move on to someone else who is working on the referring relationship.

Hiring a full-or part-time person to make regular visits using a strategy of "making friends and helping people" will ensure that many if not most of your referring relationships stay healthy and robust.

A second reason for putting energy into this strategy is the fact that referring relationships will end sometimes for reasons beyond anyone's control. A referring doctor dies, moves away, or is acquired by new owners who have differ-

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Building and nurturing relationships with medical and non-medical referral sources is the forgotten treasure trove of many practices.

their users.

Finally, marketing a podiatry practice is different than marketing a plumber or a restaurant. Find a company with a track record of working with other podiatrists. This is not the time to be the first mover with an untested company.

Referral Marketing

Building and nurturing relation-

they discover very quickly that this is an excellent strategy for building a practice. Then, most doctors stop doing this the very first chance that they get, primarily because they don't enjoy it and because they get too busy to get out and nurture those relationships. But nurture those referring relationships you must!

Every relationship in your life,

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ent referral patterns. Your marketer must be continually prospecting for new referral sources to replace the inevitable loss of existing referral sources.

Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Hopefully, your number one source of new patients are existing

Paks, phone books, billboards, etc. were the only games in town. It was frustrating and expensive to “broadcast” our messages to whomever happened to be listening, reading, watching, or driving by. No longer. Using tools like radio, for instance, are still viable options for medical marketers, but not until you’ve gotten your Internet, referral marketing, and word of mouth marketing in

who learned on the job as well. It’s not your fault that your management skills aren’t nearly as developed as your clinical skills. Most professionals, not just doctors, struggle with this same issue because management and leadership aren’t taught in podiatry school, law school, or medical school.

Podiatry is often farther ahead in this area than other medical specialties because of leadership in the profession. The American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management, to name only one, is an association devoted to sharing excellent practice management conferences with its members and all podiatrists. You can find out their schedule of meetings at www.AAPPM.org.

There are other consultants and companies who have designed programs to help you learn how to manage your practice. Again, ask your colleagues who seem to have this figured out how they learned to manage their practices, and follow their lead.

This is truly the key to getting your nights and weekends back. Technology, while promising for medical management, has been frustrating at best for everyone.

It is your business responsibility to maintain a relationship (a marketing relationship) through regular educational and inspirational messages to your patients.

patients. Your list of patients who already know you, like you, and trust you, is, and will always be, the number one asset in your practice after you and your well-trained staff. The primary issue here is that these same patients lead very busy, complicated lives, and referring others to you (even remembering your name) is just not a high priority to them. Here is where the word nurture is even more important.

It is your business responsibility to maintain a relationship (a marketing relationship) through regular educational and inspirational messages to your patients. Email has made this so inexpensive that it’s unfathomable that a practice wouldn’t do this. There is a catch, however, in that we don’t read many of our emails anymore unless we are really motivated to do so. And your patients would be motivated to stay healthy from good messages about their health from their doctors if it was extremely easy for them to engage. Answer: get good at producing short (less than 2 minutes) videos that make it easy for your patients to stop for a moment and engage with your educational messages. You can email these to your patients and, of course, propagate them all over your online platforms.

Marketing to the Community

Before we all had access to powerful technology and Internet platforms, radio, TV, newspapers, Val-

great shape. There is no point in using expensive television advertising to send people to a website that is old and difficult to use. It’s a waste of money and time. If you have a great online presence that you can integrate into advertising, then, by all means, give it a test; but until that happens, save your money.

Practice Management

Consider that quote again by

You can spend all of your time upset that the whole thing is so unfair and truly, tragically flawed, or you can spend all of that energy doing what it takes to be successful in this new reality.

Peter Drucker, who is one of the best-known and most widely influential thinkers and writers on the subject of management theory and practice: “A bad system will outperform good people with no system 100% of the time.”

Take stock of your own practice; your personal leadership and management, and your systems or lack of systems. If you are like most podiatrists, you learned practice management on the job, not in school. And you learned what you know from another practitioner

The promise of electronic medical records was that it would make everything easier. The opposite has occurred. Those practices that have sorted this out have learned that doctors can only get their nights and weekends back by using management systems that their staff is well trained to execute.

Doctor, you can’t accomplish this by yourself. You could in the old days, but no longer. Having scribing medical assistants (even virtual medical scribes) working

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side by side with you to accomplish all the record keeping in real time is a powerful and essential strategy to solve the “paperwork” night-

unfair and truly, tragically flawed, or you can spend all of that energy doing what it takes to be successful in this new reality. Cultivating and maintaining a positive mental attitude every day is a choice. Being

bring to you and your family are significantly greater than any other way to build equity and retirement income... if you are managing your practice efficiently and marketing it effectively. You can, yes, in this day and age, earn the income you deserve and get your nights and weekends back. The alternative is more of what you already know. The choice is yours. **PM**

**There is simply
no other vehicle for investment available to you
that compares to your practice.**

mare that medicine has become. Well-trained staff led by a positive coach (that’s you, doctor) will get the job done and everyone out the door by 5PM and home in time for dinner. You simply have to commit to working in a new way.

You’ve Got a Choice

You can spend all of your time upset that the whole thing is so

patient and thoughtful, taking the long view, and investing in your people and your own professional growth is a choice. Being happy instead of angry is a choice.

That Choice is Yours

There is simply no other vehicle for investment available to you that compares to your practice. The returns your practice should and will

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