

Marketing Your Practice to the Diabetic Community

These 15 steps can increase your diabetic patient population.

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Tips from the Trenches features practice management issues, and is written exclusively for PM by members of the Institute for Podiatric Excellence and Development (IPED). IPED's mission is to motivate, inspire, and synergistically bridge the gap between students, residents, new practitioners, and seasoned veterans in the field of podiatric medicine. They are committed to the idea that mentors with passion to share and mentees eager to learn make a powerful combination that allows IPED to bring and renew a full life to podiatric physicians, their practices, and their well-being throughout the U.S. and beyond. Visit www.podiatricexcellence.org.

Effectively marketing yourself and your practice to patients and other physicians is time-consuming and oftentimes downright overwhelming. Developing a niche can be beneficial to help narrow down your options, and provides a good starting point to make your marketing efforts more manageable. One such niche is what your practice provides in servicing the diabetic population.

In addition to serving as an excellent marketing tool, spreading the word to other

health professionals and the public can be a great service to the community. The ability to provide periodic lectures to all the diabetes support groups in the area, as well as senior centers, is only a phone call away. Your effort to reach out to various

website should list all presentations you've given to educate healthcare professionals and the public about any and all aspects of podiatric medicine and surgery. When you schedule your education meetings, make sure to ask if the presentation can

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groups in the community demonstrates to patients, doctors, and hospital staff that you care about giving back to the community. Make your efforts known—be sure to have a section on your practice website called “We Care about Our Community.”

One of the sections on your

be given at lunch or in the evening, enabling you to avoid missing your office hours. Always offer to bring some kind of healthy treat such as fruit or sugar-free candy, or simply ask for suggestions re: what they would be happy for you to bring. And do not forget to send a handwritten thank-you card to the individual who served as your contact for the event.

Diabetes Support Groups

Many local hospitals conduct diabetes support groups and amputee support groups. Teach patients about the importance of routine diabetic foot exams and palliative care to have

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nails, corns, and calluses debrided in order to prevent ulcerations. Let your audience know about diabetic shoes and qualifying factors that can help prevent ulcerations. Patients can learn about Charcot deformity, allowing them to recognize signs of the deformity early on and to schedule their podiatric visits sooner.

Patients can also learn about custom-made braces that can be fabricated to help accommodate for any deformity. Vascular testing can also be stressed as an important element in amputation prevention.

Presentations to Physicians

Presentations to physicians can focus on service provided on a more technical level, and can include information on topics such as wound care products, home wound dressings, and skin graft substitutes. Marketing yourself through these educational presentations with fellow medical

chase a domain name and include it prominently in any of your marketing materials.

2. Coordinate regular press releases about diabetic foot care. These can be written by an office

Extract the email addresses of these at-risk patients from your office software, using specific ICD-9 codes. Discuss prevention, care, and services/products needed by diabetic patients and that are offered in your practice. Include links for articles relevant to

Approach the local pharmacy of your choice and have them introduce you to the representative of choice who sells glucometers.

member or yourself. These can also be taken from sites such as www.apma.com.

3. All your advertising can focus on the diabetic population exclusively for a period of time. As a suggestion, allocate at least three months dedicated to diabetic foot care marketing. This will again support objective number one: creating a

diabetes, the diabetic foot, and also include healthy recipes for diabetics.

7. Develop a handout for referring physicians and their staff. The focus of this handout would be to inform them of diabetic-related services/products you do at your office that they might or might not be aware of. It will be most effective to hand-deliver these handouts to those offices, either by you—the podiatrist—or your office manager or the marketing individual within the practice.

8. Diabetic patient recall campaigns, to reactivate existing patients. Stress in your contact letter the importance of diabetic prevention and care, utilizing statistics and facts to impress upon patients the severity of the disease. Patients will be reactivated, and as part of the process hopefully their friends and loved ones with diabetes become informed as well.

9. Develop a strong(er) relationship with the endocrinologists, vascular specialists, cardiologists, and diabetes educators in your area. Make your presence known through lunch-and-learns and meetings with these specialists. The physicians' offices will become more informed of your services, with the ultimate goal of creating a team approach to diabetic care.

10. Arrange with a mail house to purchase a list of all people who have diabetes within ten

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professionals will lead to many physician referrals of newly-diagnosed diabetic patients to your office. For instance, many podiatric practices have developed relationships with PCPs, endocrinologists, and vascular specialists; these specialists are then likely to ask their patients when they last saw a podiatrist as part of their history and physical.

Here are methods to develop your diabetic patient base and inform the public and medical community of your quality care and comprehensive approach to the diabetic population:

1. Create a “Diabetic Center of Excellence” within your practice. Create a “subpage” to your website all about diabetes and the care you provide for it. You can even pur-

chase a domain name and include it prominently in any of your marketing materials.

4. Create an alliance with the American Diabetes Association (ADA) to promote health and wellness to the diabetic population. Contact the ADA Director of Community Initiatives to initiate a dialogue.

5. Inform referring physicians' offices about your diabetic shoe program. This would be a great opportunity to team up with your diabetic shoe supplier to co-develop an informative brochure or customize the one your shoe supplier has already created.

6. E-mail “diabetes-specific” educational material to your diabetic patients on a quarterly basis.

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(or more) miles of your practice. Create a mailing campaign, introducing your practice and discussing the importance of routine foot and ankle care for the diabetic population.

11. Set up “complimentary foot and ankle screenings” for the diabetic population every 3 months at the local senior centers, shoe stores, medical supply stores, weight loss centers, health club and fitness centers, senior day care centers, YM-CA’s and pharmacies.

12. Approach the local pharmacy of your choice and have them introduce you to the representative of choice who sells glucometers. Team up with the pharmacy and that representative to set up a lecture at the pharmacy on common foot problems in diabetic patients. This strategy works great with the pharma-

cy’s marketing power to promote this event, especially if the pharmacy is part of a large chain store like Wal-Mart or Target.

13. Ask the chief of the department of medicine at all hospitals where you are on staff if you can do grand rounds regarding the topic of diabetic foot and wound care.

14. On an annual basis, perform a comprehensive diabetic foot evaluation (CFDE) on all your diabetic patients. A copy of this completed evaluation form is then sent to the patient’s primary care physician and endocrinologist.

15. If you mail “welcome-to-the-practice” letters to all new patients, include a diabetes foot education sheet for diabetics. Include a note stating that you are including this information sheet because it is very important to their foot care health.

Taking some time out from a busy schedule to educate patients can of course be a fulfilling experience and will hopefully help save limbs, but it can also be a major practice builder. Implementing these internal and external marketing ideas can deliver a good return on investment of your time and help you develop a niche for you in your community. **PM**



Dr. Ornstein is Chairman of the Institute for Podiatric Excellence and Development (IPED) and a national and international lecturer and author on practice management topics. He serves on the editorial

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