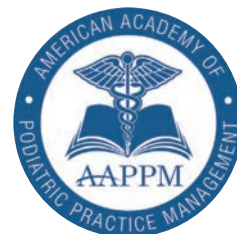




Marketing Your Wound Care Practice

You need to spread the word about your expertise.

BY ANDREW SCHNEIDER, DPM



Practice Management Pearls is a regular feature that focuses on practice management issues presented by successful DPMs who are members of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management.

You know that you are a highly trained wound care specialist. After all, you finished four years of podiatric medical school, a residency where you did your fair share of wound care and limb salvage surgery, and hours of wound care-related CME after you started practice. And while you know that you are the best choice to care for a patient with a non-healing ulcer, doesn't everyone else? Of course not! Wound care is over a \$3 billion per year industry. Every specialty wants a piece of the wound care pie.

Whenever you think about marketing a specialized area of your practice, it boils down to two main areas of focus: internal and external marketing. Internal marketing focuses on your existing patient base. External marketing involves marketing to the general public who do not know you in a professional capacity. To successfully market a niche area of practice such as wound care, you need to focus on both.

Internal Marketing

Have you ever seen a patient for periodic diabetic evaluations, only to have her disappear for a while? Resurfacing after a few months, she ex-

plained that she had an ulcer so she was sent to the wound care center for treatment. After further questioning, you learned that the "wound care specialist" that she saw was another podiatrist across town. How did you feel when that happened? If you're like me, you probably felt angry, slighted, and embarrassed. How dare she not seek your professional advice

friends, and co-workers who may indeed need that information.

Your patient list is your best resource for referrals. It is full of people whom you are helping or have already helped to feel better. They are most likely to return if you introduce a treatment or service that they could benefit from. They are also likely to refer people they know, and trust that

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and treatment! Now, of course, this is the wrong attitude to take. The only person to blame for this is you. In fact, when you calmly mentioned to your patient that you could have managed the wound, she likely responded that she didn't know you did that.

Whenever someone looks outside your practice for a service that you provide, it is often because you have done a poor job educating your patients on all the services you provide. This should be the focus of your internal marketing campaign. Any modality that you bring into the practice for any reason should be publicized to your entire patient base. Will your marathon runner need to use the latest biological dressing for diabetic ulcers? Unlikely. However, that runner has family,

they know "the best" doctor. It is up to you to provide them the information to make that referral.

Monthly E-Mailed Newsletter

The best internal marketing vehicle is the monthly newsletter. A newsletter is a means to communicate information that your patients need to know, even if they don't need it at that exact moment. When constructing your newsletter, it is important that your newsletter not sound blatantly like a plug for your practice. In fact, at least one-third of your newsletter should be about something other than your practice. As with all marketing, you should focus on the needs of your patient and not all about you. Be sure to interject your personality into the

Continued on page 72



Marketing Wound Care (from page 71)

newsletter, and even include some information about your family, meetings you've attended, vacations you've taken, etc.

Of course, newsletters take time to prepare. Not everyone enjoys writing or is ready to devote the time to making a monthly publication happen. You can hire students to write for you. You can also subscribe to a "done for you" newsletter service which allows you to customize content for your practice. Just remember, if a newsletter only comes out when you have a new product or service to sell, it's nothing more than an advertisement. A newsletter that comes out regularly, preferably monthly, becomes a welcome resource.

You can of course snail-mail your newsletter but the preference these days is certainly using the Internet.

Social Media

Newsletters are hardly the only form of internal marketing. Your

is not the best way to market your wound care specialty.

Think of the example of your wayward patient with the diabetic wound. There were two problems in the story. First, your patient had no idea that you provided those services, which you have rectified with your new newsletter, blog, and/or practice web-

to the physician conditions that he may not have realized that you treat, and services that he did not realize you offer.

The same newsletter that you created for your patients can also be used in your external marketing to physicians. You can also create special reports to highlight a

Do not assume that your patients and referring physicians understand every facet of your practice.

site. The other problem was when she went to her primary care doctor, he referred her to the wound care center. It should come as no surprise that a wound that develops on the foot of a diabetic patient will drive them into the office of their internist, family practitioner, or endocrinologist. It is there that you will find your best external marketing target.

condition and the state-of-the-art therapy you provide—for instance, education on diabetic wounds that includes what dressings you may use, advanced biologics, off-loading modalities, etc. This is an effective way to educate your referring physicians without appearing to outright ask for the referral.

It is crucial that you do not assume that your patients and referring physicians understand every facet of your practice. It is your job to educate both on how comprehensive your care is. This knowledge that you provide will pay dividends with new referrals to your office and your patients knowing that they can turn to you for all of their foot and ankle concerns. **PM**

Paid advertising in newspapers and magazines is not the best way to market your wound care specialty.

updated practice website and blogs also work well. You can involve social media, with information posted on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other similar sites. There also is little that beats a conversation in the treatment room. In addition to making small-talk, bring up the latest thing you're doing in your office for wound care. You'll be astounded how interested your patients will be, and they may tell you about a friend who "could use that."

External Marketing

Of course, a goal of marketing is not to provide more services for your existing patients, but to expand your patient base with new referrals. External marketing is often misused as another term for advertising. This isn't the case. In fact, paid advertising in newspapers and magazines

These physicians who treat diabetes may already know you, but do they know everything that you do? Some might see you as the diabetic shoe guy, but not the ulcer guy. Some may refer all their heel pain to you, but send their diabetics to a different podiatrist, not realizing that you do that too. It is, again, your responsibility to make yourself, your practice, and your specialty known to your referring doctors. Of course, for the doctors whom you do not yet know, the first hurdle is for them to know who you are.

An effective way to market to physicians is to send a letter after you see their patient. Sending a letter to a patient's primary physician sets you apart from other specialists. It will show the physician that you're willing to work as a team to get your mutual patient well. It will also highlight

This article is written exclusively for PM and appears courtesy of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management. The AAPPMP has a fifty-plus year history of providing its member DPMs with practice management education and resources. Visit www.aappm.org for more information.



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