

The Anatomy of a Referral

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The Anatomy of a Referral and How to Create Them

What is a referral? Everyone knows that they just happen! That all you have to do is to ask your patients for them and they just appear, Right? In fact, many doctors will tell you that they do not need to market or advertise their business because they built their entire practice on “Referrals”. Just Like Magic!

Well, what if I were to tell you that you can create your own referrals, any time, any place and in any quantity that you want? That there is an exact anatomy to a referral which you could apply to create all of the referrals that you want? Wouldn't that be the most powerful form of advertising available?

In order to understand a referral, we have to first take a look at the person doing the referring. Take a patient for example. A satisfied patient who understands a little bit about your practice, what types of foot problems you can fix and how you have helped them with their problems is likely to go out and tell their friends and family members about their experience. When they come across another person who has some type of problem with their feet, they will tell them about your practice and about how they have been helped. The more educated they are on feet, the more they will tell their friend about how Podiatry can help them and will then recommend you and your practice.

There is nothing new here, right? Here's another look at a referrals. Who was the one who educated your patient about your practice in the first place? You did! If you did not take the time to educate your patient about their problems and your solutions in the first place, then she would not have known enough about what you do to recommend someone else.

A good doctor naturally takes the time to educate his patients about their situation, giving them a full understanding about the basics of good foot health and wellness. These well-educated patients will generate the most referrals for you. This is why referrals seem so natural and come so easily to some practices but not others.

Now take a look at how you can apply this broadly and incorporate it into your marketing plans. The more people who you personally educate on who you are, where you are, what you do, how you do it and – most importantly – how you can help them, the more referral sources you will have.

Let's take this one step further. If in your education process you are able to actually pre-screen new people on their foot problems, whether current or potential, you will be creating new patients right on the spot.

Taking Action to Generate Referrals

Creating an effective referral campaign within a corporate health & wellness fair takes more than just arriving and looking professional. In order to create a referral you and your team must be outgoing, interactive and communicative with the participants. How else are you going to be able to sort through the crowd of people and find those who you can truly help? Yes, you will have a small percentage of any group come over to your table without any effort on your part because they already know what you can do for them. But how do you qualify those other employees in the crowd and create new referrals? Here are your basics!

What to Bring:

1. Enough people, assistant(s), to be able to effectively work with the number of employees that you anticipate to attend the health & wellness fair. You should have at least 1 person to work in front of your table/booth in order to introduce your services to the employees. You should plan on having 2 or more assistants to help with larger corporate populations.

2. Screening equipment! This can be anything from pictures/charts/diagrams of the anatomy of a healthy foot as compared with common foot problems. Bring an interactive model of a foot so you can demonstrate how the foot is designed to function as compared to the symptoms that the employee is presenting. The screening with the most impact is an interactive screening device that gives the employee an objective evaluation of their feet. The best device that I have seen is a pressure pad that the employee walks across or stands on that displays how their weight is distributed across their feet.
3. An appointment book to schedule a *Complimentary* office evaluation for anyone who thinks that they would like a complete examination. Many corporations have strict “No-Solicitation” policies which prevents any “Selling” at these events. Many corporations will allow you to book a *Complimentary* visit as it is a *Free* service. Just be careful to only offer this to those who you know are in need of your services. Offering it too liberally will be frowned on by the employees and the corporation itself as you can appear less genuine in your efforts to educate and help only those that are in need.
4. Business Cards, Brochures and a Signup Sheet for your Mailing List.
5. A tabletop display. This should be very general and highlight your business name and location. Use big pictures with very big type and avoid a lot of reading or small pictures and diagrams. Leave the educating for the interaction with your assistant(s) and the 1 on 1 consultation with the Doctor. The display is only there to attract attention!
6. Bring in a coupon for a **free** in-office evaluation for anyone who wants one. This coupon is intended for general distribution for those employees who are just ‘shopping’ the health fair. These coupons may be used for a future need, or so that the employees may refer a friend or family member to your practice. You would only look to schedule an appointment with those employees that truly have a need.
7. Finally, a door prize and other interesting giveaways. Human nature draws a lot of people over to anything Free. Put your name on All of the giveaways on your table as gentle, persistent advertising. Magnets, notepad, even ‘Swedish feet’ (not fish) have been a big hit for other podiatrists. The door prize(s) at an Omni OpenHouse Direct health & wellness event is typically displayed at the start of the health fair procession and will be promoted to the employees before and after the event, increasing your name recognition for all of the company’s employees.

What to Do:

1. Be Friendly, Interactive, Courteous and Upfront with your services. Have your assistant(s) stand in front of your booth greeting employees as they come by.
2. Ask Questions! Most of the people who will walk in front of your booth are just “Window Shopping”. Asking them a question is a gentle way to get their attention long enough for you to find out if you can help them or someone that they know.
3. Have a Survey ready to be filled out. Your survey should capture their information for your mailing list as well as to prescreen for and create interest in your services. This is the beginning of your educational process. Ask survey questions that will encourage them to take a few minutes and talk with you.
4. Have your assistant(s) review each survey and continue the educational process on what you do. Offer information for general foot problems to each employee at first, then go into more detail with those employees who are showing interest. You want to spend your time talking mostly with those employees who have, or know someone who has, a problem that you can help them with. Remember that you and your assistants are charged to Educate and Encourage them to get more information and/or come in for their Free consultation. This is important in creating your own referrals. (Your offer for a Free office consultation **MUST** be given out in Writing to eliminate future confusion.)

5. Have 1 person, preferably the Doctor, behind the table to offer 1 on 1 evaluations and to answer more personal questions or do a quick evaluation for anyone who your assistant(s) determine needs more information. The employee will then have a chance to meet with you personally, giving you an opportunity to impress on them how “You” can help them. Remember to focus on Educating, but also encourage an in-office evaluation for those who are truly in need.
6. Follow-up after the health fair with ONE phone call to those who signed up for your Free Consultation. Then add everyone to your mailing list to send out basic promotional items to them. Keep your follow-up gentle. Do not be pushy, even to those who cancel on the free consultation. You want to build good community relationships and create a reputation as a doctor who cares and who is there for them whenever they are in need.

There are many places where you can pre-screen potential patients and educate people on the benefits of your practice. I happen to prefer corporations where you know that the people you are talking to have good medical insurance, have good jobs and work in your area. Now, all you have to do is find those people who you can help, educate them on your service and how you can help them, and then sign them up for a full evaluation. Health & Wellness Fairs and Lunch & Learn Lectures are excellent venues for you to take advantage of and create your own referrals.

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