

## Pearls of Practice - 2015

The health care market is competitive. The following pearls may be beneficial to you in surviving the changing health care climate.

### A. Building your practice via patients/patient interaction

1. Send personal hand written thank you notes to patients when they send a patient to your practice. This leads to more referrals from patients and lets them know that you appreciate their referrals.
2. Create a good referral base from all specialties. Finding out who your patients see is a good place to start and build from.
3. Be direct and straight forward with patients when discussing problems that have arisen in regards to their treatment. Do not try to hide anything from them as this can cause them to lose confidence in you and seek care elsewhere. It could generate a complaint against you.
4. If you are unsure of how best to treat an issue with a patient, seek help from a colleague. Send a patient for a second opinion. Put your ego aside and remember to do what is best for the patient. The patient will thank you in the long run and you can prevent a potential problem. You may even gain referrals from them.
5. Educate your patients as to the education of a podiatrist and what a podiatrist does. They need to know that a podiatrist is the specialist for foot and ankle care.
6. "Date the patient". Always examine your patient's feet. You may find other issues that need to be addressed. For instance; if a patient is seeing you for care of their fungal nails talk with them about other concerns that they may have with their feet. This is a great time to "plant the seed" about orthotics as a treatment for their bunions, hammertoes, chronic tendonitis, etc. They may think there is no other treatment but surgery. This is your time to educate them on biomechanics. Always be concerned about the patient's podiatric health and maintenance.

## B. Building your practice via medical colleagues

1. Send consultation/treatment letters to the patient's primary care doctor even if they did not refer the patient to your practice. This is a great way to introduce yourself in your medical community. Follow these letters up with pertinent progress notes. This keeps the primary doctor informed about what you are doing for your mutual patient. This is of particular importance if you are treating a patient for a diabetic ulceration or other chronic medical condition that affects the lower extremity.
2. Send consultation letters to all physicians who refer a patient to your practice. Again this is a great way to introduce yourself in the community and let them know what you do. Sending follow up progress notes is also appropriate to keeping the doctor(s) "in the loop".
3. Call referring physicians or your patient's primary care physician to discuss problems that you may need their expertise for in order to properly manage the case.
4. Attend hospital staff meetings so that you can introduce yourself to others in the medical community. This is another great source for referrals. Take your business cards with you to hand out to those you meet.
5. Communication between physicians improves patient safety and satisfaction.

## C. Building/promoting your practice in the community

1. Offer to speak about a podiatric topic that you have particular interest or expertise in. Hospital grand rounds, continuing education lectures for staff in nursing homes, lectures in senior retirement centers are great options for his to name a few.
2. Participate in a community health fair.
3. Visit athletic stores (Dicks, Sports Authority, Big 5) to learn what kind of shoes they carry. You can in turn direct patients to stores that carry shoe types you are recommending. You may even want to offer doing a presentation on shoes for their staff.

#### D. Surgical Pearls

1. Call patients the night before surgery to see if they have any last minute questions.
2. Call patients in the evening of surgery to check in on them. They will appreciate the call and attention. It shows that you care about them. I recommend this for both in office as well as outpatient surgery.
3. Remember to speak to the patient's family before and after an outpatient or in patient surgery.
4. Do not do a surgery to make a car payment.
5. Do not plan an out of town trip for a weekend if you have done surgery that week.

#### E. Office Pearls

1. Set aside a period of time during your day to answer phone calls that require your attention. Have your staff inform patients or others who call that you return calls at that time.
2. Try to stay on time with your office schedule. Patients will appreciate that you see their time as valuable also and it keeps the level of stress under control. Of course there will be times when your schedule changes due to an in office emergency or other unexpected situations with patients. If the schedule is far behind, a patient(s) should be offered to reschedule their appointment. They should be informed that the doctor will offer them the same time and courtesy during their visit.
3. Familiarize yourself with over the counter foot care products that are available at local pharmacies. When you recommend a product to a patient you can tell them where it can be purchased.
4. Keep the office clean. Patients will notice an office that is not clean and will likely complain. This is a reflection on your professionalism and care.
5. Maintain all equipment in your office whether it is medical or business related. Harm could be caused to a patient if medical equipment is not well maintained. Keep a log of equipment maintenance.
6. Hold office staff meetings on a regular basis to discuss issues that are affecting the practice.

## F. Professional Pearls

1. Dress and act like a doctor. Be appropriate in your dress and demeanor in the office and outside the office.
2. If there is a subspecialty that you are particularly interested in, seek out continuing medical education, fellowships, etc. to expand your knowledge and skills. Find another doctor to “mentor” you as you build your skills and in turn your reputation. Examples may include certified wound specialists, diabetes educator, and pediatric biomechanics.
3. Be up to date on coding and diagnosis codes. It is ultimately your responsibility to know proper coding.
4. Familiarize yourself with the state statutes as well as rules and regulations regarding the practice of podiatry in the state(s) where you are licensed and practice. Contact your state board of podiatry examiners if you have any questions.