



**The Art of
Generating
Patient
Referrals
With a
Newsletter**

The benefits of a professionally published newsletter program are many.

- ▶ A well-written and well-designed newsletter contains timely and relevant information and is perceived by referring physicians, occupational health specialists, sports medicine specialists, podiatrists and other health care providers as being **valuable**.
- ▶ Since a newsletter is published on a regular basis, it delivers a **consistent message**. Repetition, continuity and sufficient frequency are all important factors in any practice-development program.
- ▶ A newsletter provides **visibility**. Unfortunately, the axiom “out of sight, out of mind” applies when a physician faces the decision of whom to refer a patient to. No matter how competent you might be, you stand virtually no chance if the referral source does not consider you as a viable option.
- ▶ A newsletter is **subtle**. If you are uncomfortable with the bluntness of traditional marketing techniques, publishing a newsletter may be more suitable. It can be accomplished in a way that fits your **professional image**.

Techniques for Generating Reader Attention and Responses

You are publishing a newsletter to accomplish a specific purpose—to develop your practice. There are several steps you can take to maximize the effectiveness of your newsletter program.

Develop a Distribution List

The first step is to develop a distribution list. This process can be as simple or as sophisticated as you wish.

As a general rule, be inclusive rather than exclusive in preparing your list. Depending upon your comfort level, you might even distribute a copy of the newsletter to all physicians and other health care providers within your practice area. If you are uncomfortable with this aggressive approach, you can limit distribution to those physicians and health care providers with whom you currently have a referral relationship.

Certainly, there is a middle ground: expanding to other health care providers you know, but from whom you do not currently receive referrals. Frankly, sending a newsletter is a nice way to strike up a professional relationship without “asking” for referrals. As long as your newsletter contains valuable material, you need not be embarrassed about sending a copy to any practitioner, irrespective of proximity or specialty.

One noted practice-development consultant goes so far as to suggest setting up a database and recording key information about each referring physician and/or health care provider, including date of first referral, date of most recent referral, number of patients referred per month, quarter and year. Information about each referring physician and/or health care provider should then be augmented with personal data such as birthdate, names of spouse and children, and other pertinent information.

Send an Introductory Letter

Send those physicians and health care providers who will be receiving your newsletter a brief introductory cover letter along with the first issue.

Sample Letter

Dear Colleague:

With the rapid advances in health care and on-going research in physical therapy, it is difficult for physicians and other health care practitioners to keep abreast of all of the latest developments. Since it isn't always possible for us to pass along new information on a one-to-one basis, we will be sending you [insert name of newsletter] every quarter to help close the "information gap."

Of course, there may be occasions when you will want more in-depth information about a newsletter item than we can provide within the pages of [insert name of newsletter]. If so, feel free to call us to discuss any item in greater detail.

We would also like you to know that we will be happy to send [insert name of newsletter] to professional associates whom you feel would benefit from reading it. Just send us a note with their names and addresses. We'll take it from there.

We hope—indeed, we expect—that you will enjoy receiving this informative publication regularly.

Very truly yours,

The payoff for this effort is great. A good introductory letter lets your referral sources know that your practice offers a continuing high level of service and attention. For maximum effectiveness, an introductory letter should include the following information:

- ▶ The frequency of your newsletter. You may be surprised, but recipients begin looking for its arrival.
- ▶ That the recipient should feel free to call you to discuss any particular item appearing in the newsletter.

If your introductory letter has done its job, in the months ahead some physicians and health care providers will call to discuss the application of a particular article to a current case.

Encourage Physicians and Health Care Providers to Suggest Names of Colleagues

Encourage your readers to suggest names of professional colleagues who might be interested in receiving your newsletter. Once a year, include a short note indicating that, as a professional service, you will make your newsletter available to other physicians and health care providers.

You will receive a small number of suggestions. This provides you with the opportunity to introduce yourself with a letter and a current issue of your newsletter. Be sure to include the name of the individual who made the suggestion.

The entire process will generate professional goodwill and increase your visibility within your practice area.

Perform an Annual Reader Survey

A short questionnaire, once a year, will give you some solid feedback on how your newsletter is being received.

The questionnaire need not be complex and can contain four or five basic questions. This way, you can determine whether your newsletter is being read and retained for future reference. Asking if an individual wants to continue receiving your newsletter will provide you with sufficient data to determine whether to continue the project.

If you are willing to do the extra work, designing a more expansive survey can be quite useful. Compiling data about local health care providers and their practices will produce some valuable results. First, the data itself will make for interesting reading as an insert to your newsletter. Second, you are positioning yourself as an “expert” among your peers.

Enclose Special Announcements With Your Newsletter

Mailing each newsletter provides you with an opportunity to communicate with your referring health care providers. If you have any reason to include an announcement, address change or reprint of an article by or about you, take advantage of the opportunity.

Once more, if you are willing to devote the time, there are several additional steps you can take. One possibility would be to include a photocopy of an article you believe might interest your referral sources. It might be about a technical subject or even some aspect of practice management. Just make sure that you have permission to reproduce the article. You can usually obtain limited reprint permission with a short note or phone call as long as you give proper credit.

Flag Key Articles

The “flag” can be a particularly powerful practice-development tool. The flag does exactly what the name suggests: You target certain physicians and/or health care providers that are likely to be interested in a particular subject area and then draw their attention to the newsletter article that relates to the particular topic.

An elaborate effort is not required. Experience should tell you what topics might interest a particular group of referral sources. A simple note or memo on your stationery can be photocopied to serve as the flag. Keep it short. Just mention that you think that a certain article is particularly interesting and to be sure to read it. A sentence or two is all that is needed.

Still, that sentence or two can be very powerful. The flag lets the referral sources know that you are thinking about him or her and are aware of a specific subject area. For example, if you are sending your newsletter to a pediatrician in your area, you may want to highlight an article focusing on a study involving children.

► **Note:** A measure of advance thought is involved. It is important to flag an item that is of genuine possible interest to a particular physician. Otherwise, you have wasted your effort.

One Caution

Sometimes your newsletters will arrive in the office and you will be rushed to get them addressed and sent. You may be so rushed, in fact, that you may fail to actually read the newsletter.

This happens from time to time to everyone, but you must try very hard not to let it happen at all. It is important for you to be fully aware of the contents of each issue of the newsletter, so that you will be ready to talk about any article in greater detail with any physician who calls to discuss it. A word to the wise: Make it an ingrained habit to read the newsletter before it leaves your office.

Please note that each of our articles contains a full journal reference. Further, we can supply you with supporting material, and our editors are available to answer any questions you might have.

The Practical Side of Providing a Newsletter

A good newsletter is a superb marketing tool for building your practice. Use it—but keep costs down where you can.

Cut postage costs: You should investigate the possibility of using standard class mail to send out your newsletter.

Provided you are sending a certain number of pieces per mailing, you are eligible to use a standard class mailing permit that can be used to mail the newsletter for the rest of the calendar year at a reduced price.

Contact your post office for details.

Mailing Services and Matching Envelopes

To further facilitate distribution of referral newsletters for your practice, WPI Communications now provides a variety of mailing services. Handsome two-color matching envelopes are sold separately.

If you want to mail your own newsletter copies, we can maintain your mailing list for you. WPI Communications inkjets your addresses onto two-color matching #10 envelopes, inserts your custom-imprinted newsletters into the envelopes and ships them to you via UPS or Priority Mail. You must send out a minimum of 100 copies of each issue to make use of this service.

Alternatively, we can handle the actual mailing of the newsletters for you in addition to maintaining your mailing list. To use this service, you must distribute a minimum of 200 copies per issue.

For more detailed information about the full range of mailing services and matching envelopes available through WPI Communications, please call 800-323-4995.

Conclusion

The newsletter is a proven practice-development tool for physicians. A high-quality newsletter can build awareness and expand your referral sources. More importantly, the newsletter can help position you as one of the leading specialists in your area.

Finally, in order to be effective, your newsletter should be tastefully designed, well-written and distributed in a manner consistent with your practice-development goals.

 **WPI** COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

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