3 Ways to Increase Patient Visits
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Introduction

Increasing Patient Visits: 
The Key to Your Practice’s Success

Building a successful practice ultimately comes down to one thing...patient visits. If you are not seeing patients, you are not making money. And, if you are not seeing enough patients each day, you will never be able to grow your practice. Even a busy office has room to improve and expand its patient base to even out slow spots in the schedule and protect against financial dips. The question is how to increase the number of patients you see each day without spending a lot of money on marketing.

In this guide, you will find three key ways today’s medical practice can increase the number of patient visits and the revenue that comes with them. These include:

1. Creating an effective recall/recare program
2. Building and managing your online presence
3. Encouraging referrals

Each of these areas alone can increase the number of patient visits, but the best results can be achieved by using all three.
Create an Effective Recall/Recare Program

The best place to begin when you want to increase the number of patient visits is with your existing patients. Your patient panel is one of your most valuable assets. Understanding how to tap into this source can increase both the number of patients you see each day as well as your income.

Despite this new focus on prevention, many patients are still not aware that these services are available to them without any financial burden. They may also not know that they are due for screenings based on their age, risk factors, and history. In fact, only 25% of adults age 50-64 and just 50% of those 65 years and older are up to date on their preventative care services. By identifying and proactively contacting your existing patients for timely preventative services, you can increase the number of patients your practice sees.

There are two main benefits to your practice in taking a proactive approach to offering preventative care services:

1. **Financial**: Preventative care services can provide steady revenue to your practice. Just adding four visits per day from scheduling patients for recalls can add $100,000 a year to your bottom line. On the other hand, with a patient panel of 2,000 patients scheduled just six weeks late for their annual visits, you will lose $200,000 over 10 years.

2. **Scheduling**: While the deductible reset on January 1 of each year creates challenges for many practices, promoting preventative services can keep your schedule and your income level up, avoiding potential slumps.

Although offering all of the covered preventative care services can increase the revenue for your practice, there are other opportunities that you could also consider offering in your office.

Be Proactive with Preventative Care Services

Many preventative care services are now covered by insurance with no copay or deductible. These services include well-baby checks, well-woman OBGYN exams, annual exams, vaccines, depression screening, weight management, diabetes management, and many tests like mammograms and colonoscopies. Many payers even offer incentives when patients receive their preventative care screenings on time.
Opportunity #1 - Weight Management

It is estimated that 30-50% of the patients seen each day are overweight. Due to the Affordable Care Act, weight management is now covered by the majority of insurance plans for up to 26 visits per year with no copay and no deductible for patients who meet certain criteria. This is a great opportunity to help your patients achieve better health and an improved quality of life while adding a boost to your bottom line.

For each patient your practice sees for weight management, you could potentially bring in over $1,500 a year in extra income after paying salary and benefits for the nutritionist. If you added a dietitian to provide medical nutrition therapy, after salary and benefits, you’d see an increase of over $6,000 per patient per year.

By offering diabetic management training you could reap about $3,000 a year per patient, even after paying the salary and benefits for an on-staff dietitian. To further boost revenue and make sure that your patients receive the vital screening for retinopathy each year, you could invite an optometrist to conduct the retinal exams in your office, splitting the reimbursement. By taking 60% of the reimbursement (since you are providing the office space and the patients), your income could increase by over $10,000 per year.

Steps to Set Up a Recall/Recare Program

1. Use your EHR and practice management system to identify patients in need of preventative care services. These include:
   a. Patients with chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease
   b. Patients in need of weight management
   c. Patients who may be due for physicals, well-woman or well-child checks, and other preventative care
   d. Anyone who may need immunizations, including annual flu or pneumonia shots

2. Contact patients via mail, email, text, or phone to set up appointments.

3. Set up your schedule to accommodate the increase in patient volume.

4. Consider adding a practice marketing platform that allows you to automate your recalls, saving time for you and your staff.

5. Offer patients the option to get reminders and recalls via text as well as phone or email.
Scheduling Tips to Maximize Visits

With the increased number of patient visits that your recall/recare program will generate, it is important that you use your schedule to maximize the number of patient visits that will be possible each day. There are four main ways to get the most from your time:

1. **Schedule based on your patient mix:** Determine the percentage of fee-for-service (FFS) versus capitated patients in your patient pool and fill your schedule based on that mix. If you have 70% FFS and 30% capitated, your schedule should reflect that. Schedule capitated patients in blocked capitated spaces while leaving same-day and extended hours open to FFS patients.

2. **Categorize your visits:** Analyze the types of appointments you have (such as new patients vs. established patients and acute vs. preventative care), how long each visit takes, and the resources that are required. You can then customize your scheduler with your practice resources (providers, rooms, equipment, etc.) and schedule appointments at the times of the day that make the most sense. This allows you to schedule more patients each day while reducing wait times.

3. **Consider double-booking:** According to Medicaid, one in three patients will be a no-show. To avoid the loss of revenue these no-shows can cause, look at your schedule to identify groups of patients who are most likely to cancel or not show up and consider double-booking those types of patients or appointments.

4. **Create a Cancellation/No-Show Fee:** Last-minute cancellations can be a huge drain on practice revenue. Set up a cancellation policy that is clearly communicated to all patients, requiring cancellation of an appointment at least 24 hours in advance. Collect cancellation fees by allowing the patient to pay online and bill them the same day the appointment is missed.

**Putting It All Together**

Building an effective recall/recare program using your existing patient pool is the easiest way to increase patient visits for your practice. Taking advantage of payer coverage and incentives for preventative care, reducing no-shows, and maximizing your schedule will turn your recall/recare program into a revenue-generating machine.

Reward your staff for the extra work involved in your recall/recare program by offering incentives for meeting goals for number of patient visits. A gift card, party, or cash bonus can go a long way in showing your staff that you appreciate their hard work.
Three Ways to Increase Patient Visits

Build Your Online Presence

You already have an online presence. Taking control of it and using it effectively will help you ensure patients can find you online and engage with your practice.

The three most vital components of your online presence are your practice’s website, social media channels, and online listings. Getting these three things right is the first step in creating an online marketing channel that will dramatically increase the number of patients you see in your office.

7 Keys to Getting the Most from Your Practice Website

1. Use a website vendor that specializes in medical practice websites.
2. Use a Content Management System (CMS)-based site. They are modifiable, easier to update, and allow regular refreshing, which helps with search engine optimization (SEO).
3. Have your website built by a partner that understands SEO.
4. Keep your site simple and easy to navigate. Also, coordinate your website with your printed materials to reflect your practice’s philosophy and personality.
5. Include downloadable forms, online scheduling, and patient portal.
6. Make your site mobile-friendly and consider mobile services, such as text reminders.
7. Market your site via emails to patients, referral sources, and vendors. Add your URL to all your advertising and forms, and remind patients about your website at every interaction.

Build and Manage Your Online Presence

It is an online, smartphone world. You now have to think of your patients as more than just patients; they are your customers, just like any other business. Customers have a choice of where they spend their money, so it is critical that you market your services as well as show why they should choose your practice over your competitors. The easiest and least expensive place to begin this marketing is online, and it can be incredibly effective when managed well.

Building and managing your online presence and reputation will help you increase patient visits, attract new patients to your office, and build loyalty.
Three Ways to Increase Patient Visits

Build Your Practice with Social Media

Social media can be a valuable tool for marketing your practice and increasing patient visits. Seventy-three percent of adults use social networks, and forty-one percent of people say that social media affects their choice of doctor. This is an opportunity to connect with your patients outside of your office, promote your brand, and separate yourself from your competitors.

Use these best practices to generate the most patient visits from your social media channels:

• Be consistent across your social media channels and website with your look and feel.
• Put links to your Facebook and Twitter pages on your website, business cards, and email.
• Encourage your patients and staff to “like” and “follow” you on Facebook and Twitter.
• Post regularly with useful, relevant, and actionable content.
• Include tools on your social media sites to allow patients to request an appointment and write or see reviews.
• Be engaged with your social media followers by replying to their comments and posts.
• Apply the HIPAA rules for security and privacy to your online interactions.
• Connect on a personal level, but always professional.

Claim Your Online Listings

You have more online listings than just your practice website, and it is important that you manage all of them to build the most effective online presence. Accurate listings help improve your search engine rankings, visibility, and credibility with patients.

To find all of your listings, conduct a Google search using both provider and practice names several times over a period of a few weeks. Once you have found all of your listings, go to each one to claim the listing, confirm all information is correct, and make any changes. If you want to save time on this process, there are now services that will do this for you across multiple sites.

Tip: Add your photo to your listings in physician search and ranking sites to stand out from the competition.
Manage Your Online Reputation

With your online presence established, it is important that you continuously manage your reputation. A report from Pew Research shows that the search engine is the first stop for eight out of 10 patients seeking health information. You want this information to be accurate and positive.

Seventy percent of consumers say that they trust online reviews. Once you own all of your online listings, you should regularly check them for new reviews or ratings. Encourage your patients to post reviews through follow-up communications. With a good marketing platform you can request reviews and syndicate them across multiple sites. Great feedback from satisfied patients will bring new patients to your office, encourage referrals from current patients, and protect your practice’s overall review score. To show your appreciation for patients who give positive reviews, always post a thank-you.

The Ongoing Process of Reputation Management

Building and managing your online presence through your practice’s website, social media channels, online listings, and review sites will pay off in increased patient visits, stronger patient engagement, and loyalty. Think of this as not just a one-time marketing tactic but as an ongoing process that will allow you to promote your brand and practice philosophy.
Encourage Referrals

Bringing in new patients is a vital way to increase visits. One way to do this without spending a lot of time and money is to encourage referrals. Your patients, and even other physicians and their staff, are your best source of referrals. You just have to understand how to build your referral funnel and keep those referrals coming.

5 Steps to Increase Referrals from Patients

1. **Build allegiance with your patients:** Maintain a strong doctor-patient relationship and create loyal patients, and they will become your best advocates. Forge this allegiance by:
   a. Using your patients’ names
   b. Keeping personal facts in patients’ charts so that you can offer birthday wishes, etc.
   c. Making eye contact with your patients
   d. Providing stellar customer service
   e. Offering low wait times and great access
   f. Exceeding patients’ expectations

2. **Ask patients for testimonials:** Not only are patient testimonials great for use in your marketing collateral, they show your patients that you value their opinion.

3. **Hand out business cards:** Give your business card to each patient after every visit. This gives them something they can hand to friends and family to easily refer them to your office. Remember, making referrals easier makes referrals happen.

4. **Check in with your patients:** Following a procedure, hospital stay, or even just a routine visit, email or call your patients to check on them. This shows that you care and are willing to go the extra mile for your patients.

5. **Express appreciation:** Once a patient has referred a friend or family member to you, make sure to express sincere appreciation. There are HIPAA-compliant ways to do this. Ask patients how they heard about you, and if it was through an existing patient ask if you can reach out to thank that person. Then, you can send a nice card or mention it at their next visit.

3 Steps to Increase Referrals from Physicians

Other physicians and their staff are another source of patient referrals that can increase the number of visits. By forging alliances, building allegiance, and expressing appreciation, your practice can rise as a preferred practice among these physician referrers.

1. **Forging alliances:** Building alliances with other physicians, including your competitors, is a great way to strengthen your position in the market and nurture relationships that feed your practice. Taking advantage of professional networking opportunities is the key to these alliances. These opportunities include:
   a. Medical affiliations, county associations, specialty associations, hospital events, trainings, and lunch-n-learns provide great venues to meet potential referring physicians.
   b. Practice visits made by the manager, physician, or a marketing specialist to introduce the practice to other offices can position you as someone they will likely refer to or consider in the future.
c. Welcoming new providers in established practices and offering assistance to new physicians in town introduces your practice and encourages a strong referral relationship.

d. Aligning yourself with your competition as a colleague by sharing information and resources allows you to explore opportunities for sharing costs and access for patients.

2. **Building allegiance:** Building allegiance with potential referring physicians and their staff consists of three key areas:
   
a. **Clear communication:** You and your staff must be able to communicate clearly with referring physicians and their staff—as well as the patients that they send to your office. Help the patient understand their diagnosis, treatment plans, and the next steps. For the referring physician, make sure that a copy of the treatment plan and assessment is written clearly and sent to them in a timely manner and make yourself available if they call.

b. **Respect and courtesy:** Make sure that your staff is respectful and courteous to the referring physician, their staff, and the referred patients. No doctor wants to hear that their patients were not treated professionally.

c. **Good office environment:** Maintain a clean, up-to-date, comfortable office with which referring physicians would like to be associated.

3. **Expressing appreciation:** Expressing sincere, thoughtful, and regular appreciation to those practices that refer patients to your office is the key to ongoing referrals. Be creative, remember something that is important to them, host an event, or share an educational experience. The more personal you make it, the more likely it is to be remembered.

Appreciation isn’t something that you check off once unless you only want them to refer once. Use a consistent, repetitive approach to feed your referral funnel.

Taking an Organized Approach

The best way to set up your referral funnel is by using an organized approach:

a. Determine who will be responsible for identifying target practices/physicians, tracking and planning interactions, making contact, being the “face of the practice,” and thanking those who refer.

b. Track referral patterns over time.

c. Develop a referral program that includes a budget per year and a schedule for all interactions.

d. Make sure to present a clear message that is on-target with your practice’s philosophy and personality.

e. Make your referral encouragement efforts consistent, ongoing, and repetitive.

Setting up a system that encourages referrals and following up with sincere appreciation will ensure that you are building awareness and trust. This will pay off with more patient visits, happy referral sources, and higher revenue for your practice.
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