

The Patient-Friendly Office



YOU HAVE DEVELOPED A MARKETING PLAN and prospective patients are calling your office. What do they experience when they call your office or walk through your door for the first time? When was the last time you looked at your office from a patient's perspective? Have you experienced calling your office, setting up an appointment and waiting in your waiting room as if you were new to your office, feeling the emotions of someone getting their hearing evaluated for the first time? What do the look of your office and the actions of your staff say about you and the care you will be giving someone? With all you have to think about in a day sometimes these things can get overlooked.

The Front Line of the Office

Your receptionist and front-office staff are the front line in your practice's interaction with patients. Unfortunately, patients may judge you and your practice by that front line, even as early as when they first call to make an appointment. It's very important for your staff to be friendly, courteous and clear as they interact with patients both in person and on the phone.

When patients call, one simple way to make them feel more comfortable is by asking questions in a friendly and non-intrusive manner. It has been found that questions starting with "what" can generate stress. It may have taken seven to 10 years for a person with a hearing loss to call your practice to schedule a hearing test. Therefore, your receptionist needs to understand the situation and do everything possible to lower the anxiety level during a patient's first interaction. Try questions that begin with "May I," for example: "May I have your name?" All staff members should be trained to speak slowly and clearly, keeping in mind that most of your patients have a hearing loss.

When patients enter the office, make sure someone on the staff acknowledges them. We all want to feel as if we matter and that our time is valuable. Greeting patients as they enter helps to make them

feel important and that they will not be forgotten. Address patients using formal titles, such as Mr. Brown or Mrs. Smith. Many older patients feel that they deserve this level of respect until they become more familiar with you and ask you to call them by their first name.

The Waiting Room: Not Just a Place to Wait

All too often we think that it will take a large investment to update a room in our



introduce practice staff by providing short bios, credentials and images. A waiting area also offers a great opportunity to use a flat-screen TV to run educational videos; you could include looped clips from manufacturers highlighting new products or offer educational presentations on hearing, the causes of hearing loss and how today's technology can help people return to the family, friends and lifestyle activities they may have been missing.

Outside of the waiting room, try to dif-

Retail Strategies is a new column in *ADVANCE for Hearing Practice Management*. It is featured on the homepage of our website, www.advanceweb.com/hearing, where we also maintain an online archive of all columns that appear in the magazine.

homes. Sometimes freshening up a room is as easy as a fresh coat of paint, moving some furniture and eliminating clutter; it's the same for your practice. The waiting area can create a lasting impression of your practice. Is it clean and organized? Does it feel up-to-date? You can freshen up the space by painting the walls or even a single accent wall with a warm color of paint or simply by adding fresh plants and a new welcome mat.

In addition to providing a pleasant, comfortable area for patients to relax while awaiting their appointments, the waiting room also can be a place to educate and motivate them. Make sure brochures, educational materials and product displays are in inviting areas that are easy for patients to access. You might use the waiting area to inform and educate your patients on all the services you offer, or you might

differentiate the areas of the office depending on the activities taking place, such as testing, counseling or fitting. Each area should reflect the activity taking place in the space. Reposition furniture to create a more conversational consultation area if there is enough space in your fitting rooms, or add a comfortable armchair and a table. Even the simple act of moving furniture can give the office a new look at no cost.

These simple steps can help ensure that once you attract new patients to your practice they will feel comfortable and welcome. Your efforts will help ease any initial fears and plant the idea that you are someone they can trust. hpm



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Tom Nelson, MBA, is channel manager at Oticon Inc. in Somerset, NJ.