

Marketing According to Yin/Yang Principles

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The first key to practice management is to cultivate and maintain a practice where there is a flow of patients continually coming into the office to get treated. This is why marketing is a crucial component to any practice development plan, especially for the new practitioner. Marketing involves engaging the public and encouraging people to come into the office not only for the acute care of a single condition but also to become patients for the long term. Practitioners assume that a high level of expertise in their ability to treat will guarantee a successful practice. This is often the case, but is not a guarantee. Enacting a marketing plan can be helpful to the most talented practitioner and the new graduate alike. Conveniently, Acupuncturists, Oriental Medical Doctors and Acupuncture Physicians if you will, can apply yin/yang principles when developing an effective marketing plan. From this perspective, there is a yang (dynamic) and a yin (receptive) component to enrolling patients into a practice.

The yang component entails being proactive and reaching out to the public in a dynamic way. The best way to do this is through interpersonal interactions with people. Giving lectures is the first and foremost effective way to engage the public. Free lectures can be given in a variety of settings. Local organizations and associations such as Rotary and Kwanis clubs are a place to start. Lectures for senior citizens groups, condo associations, at Barnes and Noble's stores, or for specific health support groups such as fibromyalgia or hepatitis C groups are especially good. Practitioners can also host lectures in their own offices, at schools, and go into corporations for a health information lunch hour presentation. The possibilities for exposure through lecturing are limitless. For those practitioners who are timid or have language barriers,



audio-visual aids such as slide show or power point presentations can direct the attention of the group away from the individual lecturing to the visual presentation. Audio-visual aids also help you keep the lecture organized.

Often when practitioners in our field give a lecture, they tend to focus on explaining Traditional Chinese Medicine terminology. This is a mistake. The public does not want to learn a slew of new vocabulary words when attending a health lecture. Rather, people want to learn whether or not acupuncture and Chinese herbology are safe and effective methods in treating the health ailments bothering them. Instead of trying to explain Qi or the meridian system, focus on impressing upon lecture attendees that this medicine strengthens and improves the immune system due to its ability to tonify and regulate different functions of the body. Emphasize that it can balance and improve organ function as well as alleviate disease. These types of comments have a greater appeal to the public than trying to explain something like Liver Qi Stagnation. A lecture that is simple yet clear is more effective than one that is complicated and lengthy. Keeping the lecture to 30-45 minutes with plenty of time for questions is the best presentation format. You will find people asking questions that can end up leading the discussion

into something more fulfilling and related to what your audience actually cares about.

Another dynamic action a practitioner can take toward soliciting patients is to participate in health or county fairs. It is essential when manning a booth at a fair to do something interactive with people to catch their attention. If you just stand there and hand out cards you will be less likely to get new patients. Of course we would not diagnose at a fair, but "mini assessments" such as a brief basic tongue reading or pulse diagnosis are great ways to engage a potential patient. If you can tell someone something significant about his or her health after just glancing at their tongue, it assures them that you are competent and within a few moments can establish the doctor patient type of trust that is the foundation of any therapeutic relationship. For instance, if you notice the person is yin deficient from observing their tongue, and you ask them if they have trouble getting to sleep or sleeping soundly, they are very impressed that you can make such an assessment so quickly.

Educational events held at your office or open houses can be another way to actively solicit patients. Free lectures held at your office are a bit more challenging than lecturing to groups because you must promote the lecture substantially to get people to attend. One press

release is not enough to bring in potential patients to your lecture. You must ask the patients you already have to attend and ask them to bring a friend with them. Tell your patients that coming to a lecture are part of your therapy plan and assists in patient compliance. Make up flyers and post them in public places that allow it, along with sending out press releases to as many papers as possible. (Press releases must have what, when, where, why and how answered.) Open houses can be more effective at drawing people to your office than a lecture especially if you have free samples of things and offer free mini services of sorts. People love freebies!

The receptive or yin aspect of marketing and enrolling patients has to do with image and office reception. The image that you present through your advertising literature is a passive statement about who you are and what type of practitioner you will be for people. Your logo and brochures should be essential components of an overall marketing plan geared to draw patients to come see you. If you give a great lecture but your personal appearance is sloppy and disheveled or your cards are not aligned with the image you want to promote, it gives the patient a sense that you may be unorganized or unprofessional, thereby diluting their trust. Think clearly about how you want to project yourself, what kind of practice you want to have, and make a statement that is aligned with your vision through your appearance and advertising materials.

The office should obviously always be clean, yet it can have either a more clinical and sterile feel, or a more comfortable and cozy atmosphere. Every experience a patient has with you and your office tells the patient who you are and contributes to their overall experience. A more clinical setting will liken your office more to a medical office and the associations people have with that approach. The public often associates medical environments with authority, but they also may feel medical offices are cold and uncaring. A cozier atmosphere may give people a more personal feeling where they feel nurtured but

could come across as too casual or non-serious. It is important to remember that the image you create for yourself will be the image that is passed throughout your community about the type of practitioner you are.

If you engage in the yang aspect of marketing be sure your yin component nurtures the relationship you initiated with the patient enough for them to want to stay in your practice. Ground the yang with sufficient yin and your patients will stay. Cultivate the patients you have by letting them know that this medicine can treat a myriad of illnesses and if they come down with another ailment they are welcome to call your office. Often the public doesn't realize what ailments Oriental medicine can treat so your patient may end up at another practitioner's office for a condition you could have treated. This concept is called "in house" marketing where practice management training companies say, "don't let your patient walk out the back door". This simply means make sure your patients are very aware of all that you treat and consider calling you first when their health is impaired on any level.

Another in-house marketing technique is to keep your patients engaged with your practice by sending update notices, newsletters, or birthday post cards to them. If you receive an award, speak at an event or do anything newsworthy, let your patients know with a newsletter or office posting. (Let the public know with a press release). The most valuable in-house source of new patients, however, is from patient referrals. The new practitioner, particularly, assumes that patients will refer when they have successful results. Often this is true, but more often they need a reminder. Offering patients a discount on a treatment if they refer someone or simply reminding patients that if they know someone you might be able to help then they should give that person your card

is not offensive to your most supportive patients. Never feel embarrassed to ask for referrals because it shows that you care about people and want to help

more people. Post a sign in your office that states referrals are welcome or have your secretary say, "Whom else do you know that we might be able to help? Please give them our card". Always send thank you cards for patient referrals especially if you do not give discounts for referrals.

Finally, if your practice slows down, re-stimulate it by what is known in the business as "recalling". In this procedure, you simply call patients that you know you have helped in the past but who haven't come in for maybe six months. Also call patients that dropped off from a treatment plan schedule and ask them how they are doing. You are checking up on their progress. Some people will say they feel better than ever and thank you, but the good news is that they will feel you care about them and their memory has been jogged. More importantly, some people will say, "Well my back hurts," or something similar and then you can schedule an appointment for them. This technique in marketing lets your patients know you follow up and are there for them. It keeps them engaged in your practice and helps you get new patient visits for the week.

If you are dynamic and draw a patient into your office, when they come into the office nurture them with treatments, polite behavior, organized office procedures, the correct information and proper follow-up so that they feel your office is the place for them. People want to be taken care of from the minute they walk in the door to the moment they leave. If they are satisfied with your care, they will remain a patient and the yang will not float away. On the other hand, you may be an excellent practitioner, and inform and make people feel wanted, but if you don't attract new patients your practice will stagnate. Therefore, the yang component of marketing needs to be re-stimulated on a regular basis. According to yin/yang theory, the key principle remains the same. Balance the yin and yang and your practice will prosper!