

Expanding Your Practice Through Dental Referrals

by Ronald F. Arndt, DDS, MBA, MAGD

Where does most of your business come from? Most dentists will answer with “by word-of-mouth.” However, very few dentists have a strategy for increasing word-of-mouth business. Many simply “pray” for referrals. Unfortunately, that’s not enough. Referrals are to the dental practice are what base hits are to baseball players. What’s your batting average? Are you getting your share of hits?

How good are you and your team at generating new patient referrals? Take the following assessment and rate yourself at how well you do.

	YES	NO
1. I have mastered the art of getting plenty of patient referrals.		
2. I have trained my individual team members on how to correctly and effectively ask for referrals.		
3. I have a referral-gathering goal.		
4. I have an incentive and acknowledgement program for those patients who refer to me.		
5. I expect my number one source of new patients to come from referrals from satisfied, happy patients.		
6. I review, revisit, and revamp my referral generating expertise on an annual basis.		
7. I reward and recognize my team members for their referrals to the practice.		
8. I get permission to use testimonials from my referrers.		
9. I continuously look and listen for opportunities to ask for referrals.		
10. I have a tracking system in place to monitor my referral requesting success in my practice.		
11. I recognize that asking for referrals is the most effective and inexpensive way to add new patients to my practice. As such, I hold it as a high priority.		
12. I set an example for my team members by asking for and getting the largest number of referrals in the office.		
13. At ALL times I carry business cards to pass out to prospective patients and hand out when asking for referrals.		

How well did you do? Successful doctors find that the higher they rate as a referral collector, the higher their production and subsequently the higher their practice income.

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Scoring: Add up the number of **YES** answers that you checked off above. A score of:

- **12 to 13** is off the chart fantastic—your practice is likely generating plenty of New Patients. You and your team have a strategy in place. Take a bow.
- **10 to 11** is very good—not bad. You’re doing better than most dentists in generating New Patients through your referral efforts.
- **9** is good—just a little more effort and you have the potential to elevate your practice to levels of profitability and satisfaction.
- **8** is average—how important is it to be mediocre?
- Below 8 is a **red flag**. To continue growing your practice and your income you may want to take steps immediately to improve your referral strategies.

Never confuse motion with action. Frequently, many of us have wonderful intentions to move forward on a project or an idea and then get “bogged down” in a lot of activity without making progress towards the completion of our goal. Set aside time with your team to create the strategies, to develop the scripts and the communication skills that will increase your practice referrals. Following this approach will assure you that the actions you take will produce the results you want...more new patients, a happier office, and increased income.

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