

enhancing referrals



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*The Art & Science of Generating New Patients
... Part 2 of 4 (Part 1 appeared in May DE)*

from specialists

So, you have obtained the training and developed the skills to provide your patients with consistently exceptional care and experiences. You are complimented regularly on how nice your facility is. You are told daily how kind, courteous, and helpful your staff is and how impressed everyone is with your diagnostic, clinical, and creative skills. You have handed out brochures to your most satisfied patients, and you have routinely asked others to help you grow your practice by sending in more like-minded individuals. Yet, when you do the math, there still isn't enough of the right kind of new patient activity to keep the practice optimally productive and profitable.

There is no doubt that the specialists in your community have a good idea of who the most skilled esthetic restorative dentists are. They see other dentists' work repeatedly, and they know who is masterful, who is not, who is developing, and perhaps most importantly, who is *committed* to providing their patients with optimal care.

But what if you are the new kid on the block, or you have just recently sharpened your restorative skills and few know what you can now provide? Developing mutually

beneficial, collaborative relationships with the right specialists becomes essential to your long-term success.

What do I mean by the *right* specialists? I am referring to individuals who share your passion and commitment to complete and optimal patient-centered care — those with whom you can easily talk *and* who make time to communicate with you regularly. These are folks who believe that the patient's needs come first and who routinely go the extra mile to make sure this is the case every time.

So, how do you find these specialists and, more importantly, how do you get them on your team? If you live in a small to moderately sized community, you likely know those with whom you should focus your efforts. But if you live in a large metropolitan area, you may need to do some research. For instance, it has been our experience that when we find a specialist who has taken the time to train at The Pankey Institute, The Dawson Center, or with Frank Spear, we almost always have a winner.

In my mind, a winner is a specialist who views his or her work within the context of the needs of the esthetic restorative dentist. These specialists are willing to cede case planning leadership to the restorative dentist, as well as contribute masterful skills to enhance case success. They understand functional occlusion, and they highly value

Enhancing Referrals From Specialists

pretreatment planning via diagnostic wax-ups. They subsequently relish the privilege of working with properly designed provisional restorations.

Asking your favorite training institution for referrals will likely result in a philosophical match that will lead to an exciting, fruitful personal and professional relationship.

Some training institutes, such as Pankey and Dawson, have study clubs that meet regularly. These professional learning groups are both collaborative learning environments and great networking opportunities that include specialists. With my good friends Charley Varipapa and M. Johnson Hagood, I co-founded the Bob Barkley Study Club several years ago, which also served these purposes.

If you already have working relationships with highly skilled specialists, but the association is not rendering a very high level of collaboration or reciprocal referrals, it is time to consider what you are contributing to the relationship that may be undermining a more ideal outcome.

When you refer patients, do you take time to send individualized letters, clinical photographs, exceptional radiographs, specific direction, and when appropriate, mounted study casts? Do you routinely send progress reports about your joint patients to your specialists? Everyone wants to

specialists over for a well-planned dinner party. Nothing is more effective and personal than sharing a meal with others, seasoned with a little bit about your professional self.

Be aware of the influence that the specialist's team members have with their patients. A strong referral from a staff member can easily be as effective as one coming directly from the specialist. With this in mind, consider having *your* team members invite "target" specialist team members out to lunch on a day when there is time for everyone to relax and talk. Your team can convey why patients choose your practice above all others and how they would appreciate the specialist's team members' support in advancing complete patient care.

When mulling over how to enhance referrals, don't forget about the value of referrals originating from medical doctors and other professionals such as physical therapists and chiropractors. This is particularly effective if you wish to build a reputation as a reliable resource for the treatment of TMD. Consider taking "target" medical doctors or physical therapists out to lunch or presenting a "lunch and learn" at their facilities. In many cases, these professionals have several individuals within their practices who would benefit from your care.

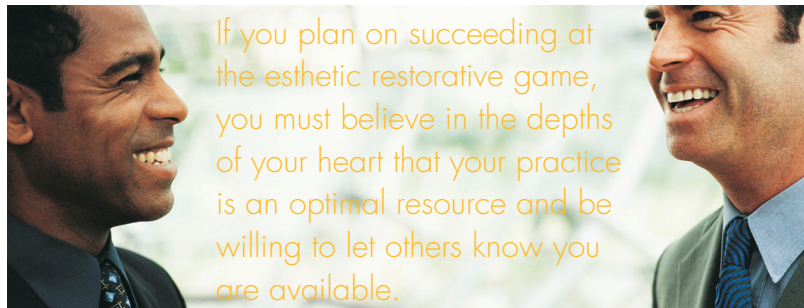
Finally, don't forget about the possibility of gaining referrals from other general dentists in your area. Some practitioners are more operatively focused and do not have the resources or interest to tackle complex esthetic and/or restorative cases. Presenting well-documented, multidisciplinary restorative cases at local dental society meetings with the contributing specialist(s) not only reinforces the professional bonds you have, but also allows others to learn more about what is possible and to

make referrals.

Integration of several or all of the above strategies will easily yield more new patients for your restorative practice. However, in cases where specialist support is inadequate or cannot be enhanced, external marketing can be used to accelerate the development of your esthetic restorative practice.

In Part III of this series, we will discuss how to develop marketing campaigns that specifically target individuals who are most likely to be interested in your finest services. **DE**

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know how well his or her work is progressing. Are you giving your specialists this meaningful feedback?

When you complete a case, do you take photographs of the outcome and send them with a thank you note to the specialist for his or her masterful contribution to the case's success? Specialists are starving for properly photographed, completed cases that they can show others. Are you making it easy for specialists to show *your* cases?

Do your specialists have up-to-date copies of your practice brochure? Do they know you have a Web site that functions as an online brochure so their patients can learn more about you?

If you plan on succeeding at the esthetic restorative game, you must believe in the depths of your heart that your practice is an optimal resource and be willing to let others know you are available.

Take your specialists out to dinner and discuss the distinctive benefits patients gain from the working relationships you have with them. If you like to cook and want to "kick it up a notch" as Emeril Lagasse says, invite your