



Developing your referral base

If you're building a clinic or program within an already established facility, this will strengthen your relationship with existing referral sources. This means your program's position within the community will grow, and you'll have a greater ability to attract new referral sources.

If your program is part of a new facility, or you are moving into a new community, the unique quality of your program will help your practice stand out. Word of mouth and a history of outstanding service also will help you build a strong reputation over time. However, the key word here is "time" as you build relationships with your referral base.

Regardless of which of these scenarios describes your program, below are some highly effective steps to expand your referral base relatively quickly.

Step 1: Strengthen your existing relationships

Provide documentation – One of the most essential elements of marketing your practice to busy physicians is to create documentation that is accurate, concise and user friendly. Referring physicians will look to you for patient diagnosis and treatment planning, but they will appreciate clear documentation, evidence-based recommendations and prompt concise patient reports. The NeuroCom® assessment tools, for example, provide automated documentation in areas such as comprehensive assessment reports, evaluation notes, progress reports and training reports.

Demonstrate value and benefits – It's critical that your referral sources have a clear understanding, not only of the services you offer, but also of the clinical value and benefits that your program provides. It should be clearly demonstrated that your program can help physicians, their business practice and their patients.

You also may want to consider some of the marketing activities suggested earlier. For example, you could host an open house for your referring physicians. You also could offer to give a presentation to referring physicians and their staff.

Vary your referral patterns – When appropriate, refer patients to your referral sources as part of your physician relationship building. A comprehensive balance program by its very nature will attract a wide variety of patient populations requiring different levels of treatment from different areas of specialty.

Step 2: Develop new referral sources

Create complementary services – Given the broad patient populations served by a successful balance program, there is tremendous opportunity for partnering with physicians from a variety of disciplines.

If you've identified the professionals and organizations that have the potential to refer patients, you can pinpoint common areas of interest. For example, physicians



conducting bone density screenings for their elderly patients will be interested in balance assessments for those patients with a higher risk to fall. As a way to introduce your facility and services, consider offering a presentation on fall risk reduction at an upcoming physician meeting.

A simple way to identify potential partners is to look at your current patients and consider their other health issues. You may discover indirect referral sources waiting to be tapped.

Join physician networking groups – Increase your opportunity for cross referrals by joining various business/physician networking groups. These are great opportunities to share business, as well as medical, ideas and information. Expand your networking to include complementary disciplines and attend conventions and meetings of other health professionals in your area.

Offer intra-specialty referrals – If your program will include specialized equipment, or you'll be doing assessments/procedures not available anywhere else in your community, you may want to consider offering your services to your clinical peers. They may find components of your programs helpful as an adjunct to their own programs and refer patients to you for specific evaluations.

Conduct balance screenings and patient seminars – As a way to increase exposure for your programs and generate greater patient awareness, consider conducting free balance screenings. Another approach is to make presentations at various community organizations your patients are involved in. When patients attend your balance screenings, offer to work with their physician and provide him/her with specific screening results. When speaking to a targeted audience, such as an elder care facility, invite other physicians who also have an interest in that particular audience.

Include patients as a resource – More often than not, patients suffering from imbalance or dizziness have seen several physicians in their pursuit of physical recovery. Ask patients if they're willing to let you send copies of their evaluation reports to all the physicians they have seen for their dizziness problem. Sending reports to these additional physicians will increase your visibility and potentially broaden your referral base.

Tap into non-traditional referral sources – Consider alternative referral sources, such as attorneys and health insurance representatives (since they can authorize payment of your services). Consider offering seminars targeted to payers, risk managers and insurance rehabilitation specialists to help educate them on the value and cost savings your programs represent.

Nurses and hospital employees are another important referral source, since patients sometimes often ask them for recommendations. Offer to speak at professional meetings, such as those related to rehabilitation nurses, physical therapists and others. Pharmacists are another excellent referral source. Talk to local pharmacists about your program and share information about how certain medications can cause dizziness.