This is something I’ve struggled with over the years. How do you get your staff to ask patients for referrals?

Easiest way to ask for a referral, at least for me, was to always have a prop (referral card) and just ask, “Would you mind sharing our practice information with your family and friends?” No one ever took offense. I had a referral card that they could actually share and they never felt like I was putting them on the spot. Maybe start a reward system for those that ask. It’s a struggle that I see many offices go through and a lot of them have overcome it by having incentives/goals and they made it fun.

I agree with Mary Beth here. Tying incentives to positive behavior will increase positive results with the team every time. Does it stink that you have to create incentives for what should be expected behavior? Yep. But it works. The referral cards work great. Create a referral contest for both the team and patients with a giveaway at the end of the month. Have a place for the team and the referring patient to put their name on the card. As the referrals cards come in, put them in a bowl and draw one name per month for a giveaway. Patients love Target, Walmart, Best Buy (you name it) gift cards, and the team loves cash. Draw one card each month and reward the referring patient and the team member. A $100 gift card for the patient and $100 in cash for the team member will generate great results.

You can put a new patient offer on the referral card to entice new patients and add a QR code for your Facebook where you will announce the winner each month. This will generate patient awareness of your Facebook as they wait to have their name announced.

Create a script: “Mrs. Patient, I always look forward to your visits. If you have friends or family that need a great dentist, we would love to have more patients like you. We do a monthly drawing for referrals and Dr. ____ gives away a $100 ____ gift card. We announce the winner monthly on our Facebook page. Would it be okay to give you a few cards for friends and family? I would love to see you win!”

Have the team practice their scripts. Do a referral challenge a couple of times each week at your morning huddle. Call on two team members and have them each give the referral script. Have the team vote on the best script and place the winner’s name in a bowl. If they are both awesome, put both their names in. Do a monthly drawing for $50 cash or gift card at the last huddle of the month, as well as the referral drawing.

You spend $250 a month for the cheapest new patient marketing ever, create awareness of your Facebook page and your team gets really good at asking for referrals. Plus, it makes them happy. Teams like opportunities to make more money, and they like games and fun.

These work great! We started doing this last year and actually decreased our marketing budget because it was working so well. The card is great because the patient walks away with...
something tangible and the offer is printed on it. We designed and made ours using Vistaprint and the cost was reasonable. Thanks, Mary Beth, for giving us the idea last year!

There doesn’t have to be an incentive. It’s a referral “prop” card that lists all of your fantastic services that patients can hand to other patients. (And you can give “free” whitening to new patients at the completion of their exam.) Why not share that information or even implement new patient specials? Here is a sample from a client in Michigan. It’s perforated between sections and notice there is no incentive. It also helps update patient communication preferences and gets them to connect with you on social media. Just an idea. Might not be a fit for everyone.

OK, so I told a patient today that she is one of our best ambassadors, and we want her to send in more people just like her. Gave her some cards. She owns a hair salon.

Now send a nice bouquet of flowers to her salon as a “thank you.” When her customers comment on how pretty they are and ask who sent them, she can tell them they are from her dentist and give them your card!

The best internal marketing plan is exceeding the patients’ expectations of what a dental visit should be. Once one has that down to a science, then asking for referrals happens organically. A patient says, ‘Wow, that was great!’ and the staff responds with: “I’m thrilled you had a nice experience. We love to make you comfortable and if you have any family or friends that would benefit from our care, please send them our way. In fact, we’re having a ______ this month to thank our patients.” I, and my team, find that asking for a cold referral sucks. But when they have just had a great visit, it’s time for referrals and testimonials. Cheers.

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