

Grow Your Practice Through Patient Retention



Patients have many options when choosing where to go for aesthetic treatments. Learn strategies for turning your current patients into repeat customers.

BY JENNY WICKENHAUSER

>> Be honest. Have you truly measured patient retention in your practice? While it is nice to think every patient will return to your practice, the reality is that many only come for one or two visits and never return. Repeat patients are crucial to the long-term success of your practice, therefore you must not only focus on acquiring new patients but retaining existing ones.

Yet, if you are like a vast majority of practices, you spend a considerable amount of time, effort, and money on gaining new patients versus keeping current patients. This is counterproductive. It is widely known in the marketing world that it costs more to recruit new patients than it does to retain existing ones. Besides being less costly, marketing to your existing customer base is more likely to increase sales and grow your practice. Knowing that, it is important to reach your current patients—but how?

WHAT AIDS RETENTION?

Patients have many choices when it comes to medical aesthetics providers. For this reason, should patients choose your practice, do not take them for granted. You must frequently remind patients why your practice is the best choice for their needs, so they continue to do business with you. Repeatedly educating patients on other products and services they would benefit from in your practice is one way to help retain them. This tactic is called moving them along the continuum. It would be a shame to have your patients go to a competitor for a service or product because they did not know it was offered in your practice. Unfortunately, as a consultant, I see this happen all too frequently.

Think about it. Existing patients already trust you and your staff, so educating them on treatment maintenance as well as additional services and products you offer will make them less likely to go elsewhere.

WHAT IS YOUR PATIENT RETENTION STRATEGY?

This can be daunting if you have never put together a retention plan. Get started with the basics. Use your prac-

tice management system or other analytical tools (e.g., external rewards programs) to pull reports. Also, mine your database and analyze your practice's behaviors around retention. Some helpful areas of opportunity include:

- Patients who received a consultation but did not book a treatment.
- Patients who have not been back to your practice in six to 12 months.
- Patients who are ready for retreatment or repurchase but are not on the books.
- Patients who are not prebooking their next treatment.
- Patients who are not receiving full correction. (Tip: Full correction equals a happy patient.)
- New patients who are not being booked for a two-week follow-up appointment to ensure they are happy with their treatment.

Designate one person within your office to run reports on those items on a weekly or monthly basis and proactively reach out to those patients to re-engage them. Additionally, have a staff member look at your standard operating procedures around prebooking to see if any changes can be made there to improve retention.

As for reaching your existing patients, email marketing is still considered an effective method. It can inexpensively reach a broad audience, and if you follow the latest email marketing practices, it can drive education and action.

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Designate one person within your office to run weekly or monthly reports. Mine your database and analyze your practice's behaviors around retention. Once patients are identified as lost to follow-up opportunities, that staff member should proactively reach out to those patients to re-engage them.

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Patient education should come directly from staff, too. Be sure to proactively update your staff on any upcoming special offers and educate them on how to introduce these services to patients. Furthermore, make sure your providers review the patient chart before each appointment. This may help the provider identify if the patient has purchased skincare products in the past and if it is time to replenish. Also, the provider may identify—and relay—additional treatment areas and potential future solutions to address patient concerns.

Ultimately, the goal is to continue to educate—not sell—all aesthetic patients who come into your practice regardless of procedure or service.

HOW DO YOU MEASURE PATIENT RETENTION?

A good place to start is to pull charts randomly. It is important to pull charts randomly because we can all fall victim to selective memory. It is only natural to remember patients who return often and forget those who are “one and done.” Reviewing objective charts helps you to be honest with yourself.

When looking at charts, pay close attention to what treatment(s) your patients originally visited your practice for, what treatment(s) they actually received, whether they were educated on a treatment plan going forward, and if they returned to the practice. This information is best recorded in a spreadsheet format, so trends are easy to find within your data.

A quick, simple way to calculate your retention rate is by looking at treatment recommendations versus treatments booked for a specific group of patients. For instance, let’s say in September you had 100 patients get wrinkle relaxing treatments, and it was recommended that each patient return in four months for retreatment. If 30 of those patients returned in that four-month period, your retention rate is 30 percent.

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DON'T LET THEM GET AWAY

Lost patients are typically invisible to practices because they are literally overshadowed by frequently seen patients. However, retaining as many of your patients through education, tracking return visits, and internal marketing is the single best effort you can make to grow your practice. Challenge yourself and your team to take a hard look at what changes you can implement in your practice to increase your retention rate. You will be pleasantly surprised by what your return on investment is when you focus attention on patient retention in your practice. ■

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