



Maximize Your Two Minutes in the Doctor's Office

By Anne Lemere



The increasingly competitive landscape of the home care industry is driving the need to re-evaluate the strategies through which home health and hospice providers deliver their message to referral sources, patients and community resources. The same old approach just isn't working anymore. As I work with our consulting clients across the United States, more and more sales representatives are telling me that gaining access to hospital discharge planners is becoming increasingly difficult. For free-standing agencies competing against strong hospital based agencies, an effective physician sales strategy is often the most successful path to choose for building market share.

As many of you already know, targeting physicians for home care and hospice referrals can be a difficult and sometimes grueling process. The marketplace is crowded with home health competitors, medical device and pharmaceutical representatives, all clamoring for a few minutes of a physician's time. Most physicians spend an average of only 10 minutes per patient, due to patient overloads and productivity demands, leaving little time for sales representatives. Physicians are also "time challenged" by the demands of an aging population. It is estimated that by 2011, most physicians will spend at least half of their time caring for older patients. "Frequent flyers" or patients who call their physician's office frequently require a lot of attention that is unbillable service. As a home care professional, you know that often these "frequent flyers" are the very patients who can be helped by skilled care or intervention in the home. But how do you get to the physician in these days of limited time and access? Here are a few tips for maximizing your two minutes with a referring physician:

Be Prepared

Success in marketing to a physician is not a "fly by the seat of your pants" proposition. Home care sales representatives must be skilled in weaving numerous "two minute" messages into long-term, referring relationships. This requires a combination of skill and planning. Remember that you only have about two minutes to "sell" the physician on developing a relationship with you and your agency, so have the physician appropriate positioning statement ready at all times. Often referred to as an elevator speech, positioning statements explain in a concise manner (about the amount of time it would take you to ride 3 -4 floors in an elevator with a stranger) how a relationship with your agency will **benefit the physician**. Remember, your first step is to "sell" the physician on the **benefit** of building a relationship with your agency.

Develop your "elevator speech"

There is an old acronym in sales circles called WIIFM. It means, "What's in it for me?" The "me" in WIIFM is the customer. When developing your elevator speech – think about the customer, in this case, the physician and what's in it for him or her? What are the issues that are important to the physician and the physician's practice? "Saving time and making money" says Dr. Tray Dunaway MD, FACS, CSP a well know physician and author. Your elevator speech or positioning statement should explain in a concise manner how your agency will save the physician time, provide excellent care and make his/her life less stressful.

The typical physician's day is structured around short, controlled segments, so convenient, quick snap shots of pertinent information work best for the busy physician. Therefore, our first step is to "sell" the physician on the value of developing a relationship with your agency, not provide a verbal "brief case dump" on all of the services provided. Think about how your agency differentiates itself in the marketplace. Do you have specialized staff for diabetes care? A cardiac rehab or wound care program? If the physician sees that you can handle tough cases then he/she will know that you can handle the routine ones.

For expert homecare advice, consult the experts

Maintain regular call cycles

The pharmaceutical and medical device industries have conditioned physicians and staff to expect to see sales representatives on a routine basis. Home care and Hospice sales representatives should develop routine call cycles based on the potential referral volume of the practice and days that the physician or staff see representatives. By maintaining a disciplined routine, your visit will eventually be “expected”. Build an action plan based on the established call cycle for each physician practice with action items that you will provide for each visit in the call cycle. Providing referral feedback, outcomes data, education about specialty programs and other industry information should be part of the action plan. Remember, convenient, quick snap shots of *pertinent* information.

Build relationships with the whole practice

Even though physicians have the ultimate authority in their exclusive ability to provide orders for home care services, it is often other staff members who actually direct home care referrals. Nurses, Medical Assistants, physician extenders, schedulers should be key targets for relationship development. Having a good Contact Relationship Management (CRM) system in place will help track all contacts within a given practice as well as the previously mentioned sales cycle and action plan.

Position yourself as an educational resource

It never ceases to amaze me how much of an opportunity exists to educate physicians on home care services. How often do you hear the statement: “We just let the hospital take care of the home care referral”. What about patients that could benefit from home health intervention and in doing so, possibly avoid a hospital stay? Many practices don’t understand that home care services can be provided to patients without a recent hospital stay. Educate these practices with information about criteria for home care, and common diagnosis or conditions of patients that they see in the office that could benefit from home care services. Paint a picture of the “ideal home health patient”.

Make it easy for physicians to do business with you

Physicians expect you to make it easy to refer. After all WIIFM for the physician means *saving time!* Ask the office staff how they prefer to make a referral and be sure you can accommodate with several referring options. Anything you can do to make a physician or practice staff’s life easier will go a long way towards building a strong referral relationship. And always, a simple “thank you” for the referral goes a long way.

The importance of specialty programs

Findings from a Scott-Levin study of 6,000 doctors found that over 60% of the reps they see are “specialty reps” and 90% of those physicians preferred to be visited by a specialty rather than a general sales representative. Having a well defined, effective specialty program can be key to generating referrals from physician practices. Utilize appropriate subject matter experts within your home care team. That specialty program often provides the reason for that first referral, and we all know that the first referral can be the most difficult to obtain.

“It’s just lunch”

Pharmaceutical and medical device companies have created a physician marketing environment where providing meals is a primary means for gaining access to physicians and staff. Unfortunately, many physician practices do not understand or differentiate the regulatory environment that home care providers operate under. And this can create a slippery slope for home care sales representatives. Be very, very cautious about providing meals to physician practices. Elaborate meals can be construed as an inducement to refer. Make sure that if you are providing some form of refreshment, that you are also providing good educational information about home care in general, not just about your agency.

Take the time to evaluate what you really get out of “lunch and learn” events. Most large practices have lunch provided by some vendor or another on a daily basis and if you were to ask a key staff member who brought lunch yesterday, they rarely remember.

These are just a few suggestions for maximizing physician practice business development strategies.



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