



- HOW TO -
GENERATE REFERRALS
- FROM THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY -



6-FIGURE BIZ
ACADEMY
FOR NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS



HOW TO GENERATE REFERRALS FROM THE MEDICAL COMMUNITY

Generating physician referrals is an excellent way to build your practice, regardless of whether or not you accept insurance or are a cash pay practice.

Physicians operate on a fee-for-service model and are not rewarded for lifestyle counseling and behavioral change. Additionally, because primary care docs need to see a patient every 7 minutes to stay profitable, they simply do not have the necessary time to counsel their patients on important nutrition and lifestyle topics. That's where you come in!

Below is a step-by-step blueprint designed to help you to develop an action plan that results in game-changing results.

Start by Targeting THE RIGHT practitioners.

Just like you have an ideal client you also need to carefully target your referral partners or those with whom you'd like to develop professional relationships and potential collaborations. Start with practitioners in your inner circle – perhaps your own practitioners, those who you've heard about through friends/family, and those whose philosophies align with yours. Also, consider whether or not they actually treat YOUR ideal client, their sphere of "influence" and how busy they are in their practice (note: the super busy docs are harder to get to BUT can be more fruitful in terms of referral potential). You'll want to create an excel spreadsheet where you "brain dump" a list of practitioners to target. Track all interactions so you don't get confused.

Note that not all physicians are going to be good referral sources - some will be amenable to referring to you and some won't. That's okay! You only need a handful of great partners to rock your practice. Be sure to prioritize these physician relationships.



Shift Your Mindset From “How Can the MD Help Me?”... to “How Can I Help Her/Him?”

This is huge. This is not about you selling yourself (i.e. all of your amazing credentials and accolades) - although they'll want to know that you are qualified/credentialed. The main objective is this: *How can you make their lives easier?? How you can help them help them by helping their patients become more successful at achieving their health goals?*

As mentioned above, docs are very busy and don't have time to adequately help their patients with lifestyle and nutrition changes. *If you can position yourself as a trusted resource (one that will help their patients succeed) you can become the HERO.* They will be relieved to be able to offer a viable solution to their patients.

Special Note: Another great strategy is to inquire if the doc is accepting new patients and that you'd like to get to know more about his practice because you are building your referral list.

Strive To Develop Professional Relationships and TRUST.

The name of the game in generating referrals from the medical community is RELATIONSHIPS (and trust). You cannot develop professional relationships by hiding behind your computer - you've got to get out and talk to people and meet them face-to-face (or via a ZOOM meeting). An introductory letter or email can be a good first step but it doesn't replace in-person meetings. You'll want to find ways to “nurture” these relationships and to stay top-of-mind after that initial meeting. This can be done by dropping by periodically, faxing chart notes or progress reports for his/her patients, interesting articles/tidbits. Keep everything SHORT and SWEET (and of course, professional).

How to get your foot in the door:

Know that the first line is with the receptionist and/or M.O.A. (medical office assistants - front line staff) - these are the practice “gatekeepers” and part of



their job is to protect the doctors' time. You'll want to be assertive yet kind to these people as they will ultimately dictate your level of success in the office.

Here's a sample intro script you can use:

"Hi, I'm NAME and I'm a Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist/Coach in the community. I specialize in working with TARGET MARKET to help them RESULTS / TRANSFORMATIONS. I was curious, is this practice accepting new patients? I often need to refer my clients and am always looking to add to my own referral list.

Also, does this practice work with a nutritionist or RDN - do they have someone that they refer to for nutrition counseling? I thought I'd stop by introduce myself to the office and to let you know that I'm available to help support the practice. I love what I do and realize that it can be challenging for the physicians to find time in their busy schedules to answer nutrition and lifestyle questions and to help patients to achieve their _____ goals. I'd like to offer my assistance with that - to support the physicians and their patients. Would it be helpful if I left (brochures, cards, tip sheet, etc.)?

Is there a time when I might be able to quickly introduce myself to the staff/ doctor? I know they are very busy - I'd love to share a bit about what I do and how I can help to offload some of the time demands they are facing with patients and their questions about diets and nutrition. It has to be hard for them to stay on task with so many patients each day and handling all of the extra questions they must get. This is something that I can help with!"

OR:

"I'm a RDN in town and I think I can help Dr. X with his/her clients who want to _____" (fill in the blank based on your target market). I'd love to host a free workshop for the office (or schedule a quick introductory meeting with the doctor). Is that something that would be helpful?"

Note: You're not necessarily asking her for a favor - instead you want to flip



this attitude to “*how I am able to help the doctor and his/her patients*”.

Note: You can absolutely drop by but don’t “expect” the doc to be able to stop and chat. Often they have a system in place for these types of meetings - which may involve dropping by on a specific day/time. The goal is that you make initial contact and keep trying.

Meet with the doc

Use a conversational form of the “What Do You Do” statement. When you get a minute with the doc, it’s important to let them know WHO you work with, what are the problems you help solve and what are some of the outcomes that are possible as a result of your work.

I suggest that you integrate a conversational version of your WDYD statement:

“Hi Dr. NAME, I’m NAME and I’m a private practice Registered Dietitian in the area and I help target market who are struggling with frustrations and challenges so that they can results/transformations.

I know you’re incredibly busy and it I’m hearing from other physicians how challenging it is these days to squeeze in everything you need to do – from seeing patients to paperwork and charting – let alone finding time to counsel patients on _____. I wanted to let you know that I’m passionate about helping people in these areas and I’d love to be able to help your patients and hopefully free up some of your time!”

Is there a specific patient type that you see that you’d like to refer to me for help?” OR: “Can you think of 2 or 3 patients struggling with xxx that you’d like to send my way?”

I created these referral pads for your office – do you think these would be helpful in facilitating the referral process? Would you like some pads in each exam room? Is there anyone else in the office that you’d suggest I speak with that helps with referrals?”



Note: Explain that you will call the patient to schedule the initial consultation upon receipt referral form.

How to address the “Do you accept insurance?” question

Respond by saying that although you are not currently in network you are happy to provide a super bill for services rendered. Additionally let them know that you are happy to provide a complementary consultation for their patients to discuss their unique health challenges, obstacles, goals and to help them to determine whether or not they want to move forward with working together.

Special Note: You do not need to go into a ton of detail about all of the specifics pertaining to your program. Also, to the extent possible, I do not recommend that you get specific about your pricing either. Don't be too evasive – just mention that you've got different programs depending on the patients individual needs and that you'll be in a better position to make a recommendation after the that initial consultation (i.e. strategy session).

Grab their attention with snacks and/or coffee.

Funny thing is that docs love free food and coffee (as does the staff!). The drug reps have been using this strategy since the beginning of time because it works - and you can do it too. Note that you don't necessarily have to bring in an expensive catered lunch - if that's outside of your marketing budget, try bagels and cream cheese or a homemade treat instead.

Educate the doctor and staff.

The key here is to offer value by talking about the problems you can help solve and the exact process for referrals. Make it easy for the doc and staff to get in touch with you - as needed.



Make referrals a no-brainer.

As mentioned above, I recommend using referral pads and placing them in each exam room. Ideally, you'll talk with the doc about this process (he/she fills out form and faxes it to you, YOU make contact with the patient). Be sure to leave business cards and a brochure (if you have one) so the doc can provide info about you to the patient.

Tip: Don't expect the doctor to "sell" your services! That's your job. I recommend that you explain to the doctor that once you receive the referrals, you will have a conversation with the patient about his/her needs and will recommend an appropriate package/program.

Be friendly yet persistent!

Docs have good intentions but they get busy and side tracked and may forget to return your call. It's your job to follow up!

Addendum:

It can be very helpful to add a special page to your website "for practitioners" where you talk directly to potential referral sources and share relevant information to help facilitate the referral process. Be sure to use this space effectively by including information sharing information about the patients you help (target market), problems you help solve and transformation you help them to achieve. Also add a short bit about you, how you work with clients and links to your "work with me page" and your referral form. Just like all the other pages of your website, you want to have a headline with sub-headers, and a Call To Action (i.e. "click here to refer a patient now" or "email to learn more", etc.