

Success Strategies

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CareCredit continues to help deliver more value to help providers succeed. In the Success Strategies series, your colleagues share what has worked for them to successfully optimize opportunities and overcome obstacles.

■ Proven Strategies to Help Attract New Patients

Independent practice owners across healthcare specialties share common opportunities and challenges. For example, providers and teams are constantly seeking to attract new patients, which is critical to practice success. In hearing health it can be especially challenging when you factor in seasonality and the annual migration of snowbirds. For some, the winter months see little volume, while for others it is the busy season. Here are four perspectives on successfully improving new patient volume.



Dr. Melissa Rose

Certified Audiologist and owner of Nardelli Audiology



Dr. Justin West

Board-certified plastic surgeon and owner of Finesse Plastic Surgery



Dr. Brian Harris

Recognized as one of the top cosmetic dentists and partner at his family's practice, Harris Dental



Dr. Kathy Wiederkehr

Board-certified veterinarian and previous owner of PetPoint Medical Centre and Spa

Four successful doctors from across different healthcare specialties including cosmetic surgery, dentistry, veterinary medicine and audiology share how they have successfully attracted new patients through patient referrals, community outreach, social media and word-of-mouth advertising.

Growth Starts From the Inside Out – Dr. Justin West

Hands down the best way to get new patients is referrals from existing patients. It starts by creating a patient experience so that existing patients become practice advocates and who leave amazing reviews, which are critical in today's digital world.

Healthcare is personal. A patient's decision to choose you is a big decision for them – especially when it comes to surgery or life-changing care like hearing health. From the first point of contact – whether that's online or by phone – the patient needs to feel and believe that they will get the best care possible from you and your team. Here are a few tips:

Be appreciative and respectful of their time.

A highly trained and empathetic human being should always answer your phone within three rings—not an answering machine. They make your first impression, and it matters. The patient's initial call can be the difference between gaining or losing their business. The goal of the call is to answer questions while building trust and a relationship.

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We first say, “Thank you for considering Finesse for your cosmetic surgery. May I ask who we can thank for referring you?” This communicates that our patients are so happy they trust us with their friends and family. We then seek to schedule an appointment with, “We'd love to answer all your questions to see if we're a good fit for you. When would you like to meet Dr. West?”

Make new patients feel comfortable. It is as simple as helping the patient easily locate the practice and warmly greeting them the moment they walk in. Take pride in your practice and make sure it is in immaculate condition—people want to receive their healthcare in a clean environment. Everybody on staff should feel ownership over how the practice is kept, as if they were hosting patients in their own home.

Studies have shown that when you sit with a patient, patients have a perception that you have spent more time with them and connected on a deeper level. For that reason, we always do our consultations sitting at eye level with our patients

Listen, learn and confirm patients understand.

Your job is to educate and empower patients to make good decisions. It's important to ask the right questions and ensure that patients feel heard. Similar to an audiology practice, a significant percentage of our patient base is above age 50 and struggles with hearing.

We use visual learning tools to ensure that patients can see and hear the information being presented, and then ask open-ended questions to confirm understanding. It is important to make information as accessible as possible for those with additional needs.

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Empathize with the psychology of the disease.

Many patients with hearing loss, like my dad, don't want hearing aids. They don't want to be at your practice. Similarly, my cancer patients certainly don't want to have to go through reconstruction surgery. Try to talk to patients not only as a provider but also as a human. I start

my consultations by acknowledging this in a meaningful and empathetic way.

In audiology, it may sound something like, “I am really sorry that you’re experiencing hearing loss and know you may not really want to be here. But I am going to explain your options and do everything I can to find options that work best for your lifestyle.”

■ It Takes a Community – Dr. Kathy Wiederkehr

For months I worked from a portable office that sat in the parking lot of the practice we were creating, which was located in a business/commercial area. From day one, it was about building community. Once our doors officially opened, we began doing community outreach because we wanted to not only gain exposure and new clients, but we wanted to be that friendly neighbor that you like and trust. Community outreach is not for everyone, so we needed to find the right team members who were enthusiastic and outgoing. Here’s what worked for us.

Create practice ambassadors. Everyone on our team loves what they do, and they know they make a difference in people’s and pets’ lives. In audiology, I imagine that impact is even bigger. Knowing that these ambassadors are representing our business, we wanted to make sure they had the right personality and the right tools to make a positive and lasting impression.

We select team members who are skilled in communication—not just in presenting but also in asking the right questions and listening. We purposely set time aside in our practice schedule for community outreach. This is not something to do “only if there is extra time” because there is never extra time. It was a decision to make it a priority and strategically use the time we do have.

Our team is trained and equipped to go to

local businesses and apartments and create opportunities to promote and educate.

Ambassadors are given a briefing document with a specific topic to focus on, information on the community and questions to ask. It is crucial that ambassadors go into the community informed and prepared to answer any questions potential patients might have.

“We purposely set time aside in our practice schedule for community outreach.”

Meet, greet and educate. Our community ambassadors contact managers of local apartment complexes, businesses and community centers to set up events. We found that they were happy to have us come in and do an entertaining educational seminar as a perk for employees and residents. Pick a topic people would be interested in and want to learn about that is aligned with your services—perhaps information applicable to their daily lives or the correction of common misconceptions.

Presentations should be educational and engaging; icebreakers and prizes can be useful in encouraging audience participation. Remember, the goal is to help, not to sell. Bring brochures, coupons or something guests can take away with them.

Local health fairs can also be a good way to introduce your practice to a large group of people. We like to give out coupons for discounted or free first exams that use specific codes so we can track which events generate the most clients. The cost of participating in or putting on an event can vary, so it is important to evaluate the return on investment (ROI) to determine if it is profitable for your practice.

“Remember, the goal is to help, not to sell.”

Open houses open doors. We also host open houses at the practice multiple times throughout the year to invite a specific community we are trying to engage with. These typically occur every 2–3 months on Saturday afternoons. We found that once someone has stepped foot in the door, the chances of them returning as a client were much higher.

During the event, we have designated “tour guides” to show off the facilities and give a behind-the-scenes peek into the practice. We enlist the participation of vendors to make the events not only educational but also fun and festive. Advertising giveaways, refreshments, games and a take-home goodie bag has been helpful in attracting clients to the event and getting them to return for care. Open houses are a great opportunity to showcase all of the services available at your practice.

Implementing a post-event client follow-up strategy was instrumental in turning the event into actual patient relationships. Our follow-up strategy included thank-you notes, coupons, an email and an appointment incentive.

“Open houses are a great opportunity to showcase all of the services available at your practice.”

■ Referrals Create a Transfer of Trust – Dr. Melissa Rose

As we are all aware, over the past five years, the landscape of audiology has drastically changed. The good news is more and more people are talking about preventive hearing healthcare and companies like CareCredit are amplifying the message to consumers about hearing loss prevention and early intervention. As audiologists, we know that hearing health exams should be as routine as dental and eye exams. Being a visible and vocal advocate for hearing loss prevention, in both the marketing of your practice and within community outreach, is a great way to attract new patients. There are a variety of ways to do this, such as social media posts or content on the practice website to events at local senior centers and churches. Another idea is to pass out hearing protection on July 4th at community events along with a little information on hearing preservation and your practice.

In addition, we are focused on building professional relationships with primary care providers and ENTs. Patients often discuss hearing issues with their general doctor, so these healthcare professionals are a great referral base. And more importantly, they are in a great position to partner with us in proactively educating patients on the benefits of routine, annual hearing exams.

We hold educational sessions at local medical offices to share the research and data that indicates hearing loss prevention should be discussed with patients of all ages — especially teens. And that patients 40+ should be encouraged to get a baseline and annual hearing exams. If the doctors and their teams are aware of the link between hearing loss and other medical issues, they can also become vocal advocates and

help their patients take action. Again, CareCredit has resources for us to use to help inform our physician community, which makes it easy.

“We are focused on building professional relationships with primary care providers and ENTs.”

It's important to remember that establishing and maintaining a relationship that results in referrals is not a one-and-done initiative. Like any relationship it requires constant time and effort. Consider offering free hearing exams to these key referral partners or a discount on hearing technology should they need it. If they are a happy patient of yours, they are more likely to recommend you and share their first-hand knowledge of your practice.

What You “Do” Is More Than Clinical Care – Dr. Brian Harris

We've all had that “a-ha moment” or what I call the awakening. My eyes were opened to the reality that there's a more efficient way to attract new patients if we just focus on the patient's perspective—not ours.

Back in 2016, I was having an amazing day at the office doing what I love to do—patients were excited about the work I was doing and the results they were getting. Later that evening, I shared with my wife how fantastic it would be to have every day be like that particular day. Then she said something that stuck: “Everyone knows you're a dentist, but nobody knows what you do—which is positively impacting patients' lives.”

From that awakening, I began looking at marketing—specifically social media—in a whole new way. Social media is a wonderful tool for immediate communication and connection and can build a massive amount of trust when used correctly. I was hesitant at first because I figured that no one wanted to see pictures of people's teeth—in the same way people don't want to hear about the realities of hearing loss—because it isn't inherently glamorous. But then, with my wife's encouragement, I started posting before-and-after pictures of my actual patients' smiles. Despite my initial nervousness, in only a few weeks, I saw my follower count rise, and people started reaching out to me on Instagram.

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One patient, I'll call her Kendall, told me her story over direct messenger. She shared how self-conscious she was about her smile and that she had been to multiple consultations but hadn't moved forward with any practice. She sent me a picture of her smile, and I knew that I could help her, so instead of typing out a boring response and trying to get her to make an appointment, I decided to film my first-ever video consultation outlining what I could do for her as a cosmetic dentist, approximate costs, payment options like the CareCredit credit card, and what I believed her outcomes could reasonably be based on her smile.

It was not a diagnosis; it was simply sharing with her the possibilities and the information she needed to take the next step. I ended it with an

“I’m here when you’re ready” statement. A few weeks later, she came in for a consultation, and we were able to help her achieve the smile she always wanted.

In a couple of months, Kendall went from low confidence to showing off her smile on social media. I can’t even imagine the life-changing results audiologists create every single day. Since that a-ha moment, Instagram has been my number one new patient outreach, and I have over 340,000 followers, gaining more every day.

The power of social media should not be underestimated—it is a brilliant platform to showcase real patient testimonials. It gives people the opportunity to imagine what you can do for them and their smile.

There are three key learnings here:

1. Social media should show what you DO, not how you do it. Share patients’ positive outcomes and the emotional impact it has had in their lives. Patients are your most powerful marketing asset and when they are happy with the results, they are happy to help.
2. Respond immediately and personally. When you can’t be face-to-face, shoot a quick video so they can get to know you as a human not a typed response or email. Potential patients like to know the people behind the practice.
3. In the video, make the next step easy by looking at it from the patient’s perspective and what they want to know, not what you want to tell them. They want to know the options, how much is it going to cost, how they can pay for it through financing, what they can expect in terms of the process and outcomes and if they can trust you as a provider.

I have many patients over age 50, and I’ve found

they want simplicity. They want the process to be easy, and they want to feel comfortable and cared for. It’s about reducing the barriers that inhibit patients from coming to see us—whether that looks like simplifying the paperwork required for an initial consultation or streamlining the process of making an appointment. When we do all those things, we make it easy for them to choose us and move forward with treatment.

If you look at everything you’re doing from the patient’s perspective and design how your practice functions around them, you will find that patients will naturally keep coming back because it makes the most sense for them. This simple perspective shift will help expand your practice and improve overall patient satisfaction.

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