Increasing Medical Practice Referrals
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The lifeblood of any medical practice is new patients. One of the surest ways to get new patients is from referrals, whether it be from other physicians or current patients. There are a number of ways in which to increase the referral base of your practice. Here are just a few:

• **Provide feedback quickly:** If a current patient refers a friend, be quick to send a thank you card. For a referral from another physician, be sure to get your consultation report back quickly, and include a thank you note at the same time. Another option would be to meet the referring doctor for coffee and discuss the visit there.

• **Be available:** It is important for you to be accessible by phone, email, or for another doctor to drop in to your office. Discussing a possible referral can lead to more referrals in the future.

• **Get patients in quickly:** Your idea of “quickly” and the patient’s or referring physician’s idea of timeliness might not have the same meaning. Work the referral in, even if it means you have to work longer some days or shuffle some other appointments.

• **Mingle with other doctors:** Consider eating lunch in the physician areas of hospitals where you have privileges. Attend “meet and greet” meetings with other physicians. By being visible, people will start to remember who you are. Hopefully, this “glad-handing” will result in some future business.

• **Focus on the customer:** Patients and referring physicians are helping you out by sending new patients your way. Do whatever possible to ensure that it is easy for a new patient to schedule his appointment. Too many practices, it seems, do not realize the positive impact friendly phone staff can have on patients.

To support the last suggestion, the other day I was talking to a friend who was having knee trouble. She was trying to schedule an appointment with an orthopedist, but was extremely put off by the staff answering the phones. She told me that the staff person was rather rude, which is making her a bit nervous regarding the actual visit. Is this the first impression your office reflects over the telephone?

As you can see, there are a wide variety of things a physician can do to increase the referrals to their practice. The ideas above are only a few of the things that can help to increase their patient base. Have fun and good luck to you on expanding your referral base!

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