

## HOLIDAY 2008 NEWSLETTER

Years before the medical community talked about patient-focused care, my dentist got it right. First, he provided great care. He also went the extra mile with respect to patient communication. The office called to remind patients of appointment times. Following an uncomfortable procedure, the dentist himself called to make sure that the pain level was tolerable and there were no complications. Each patient received a birthday card, a note of thanks for being a patient, and an acknowledgement for referring new patients. What about you? How do you communicate with patients, not just on birthdays and holidays, but throughout the year? Here are some suggestions.



**Margie Satinsky**

1. **Make communication with your practice easy.** Every patient contact with your practice is an opportunity for good communication. Let's start with your telephone system. Do patients speak with a human being, and if not, do you have clear instructions for call triaging? Do you set and monitor standards for calling patients back? Do you randomly listen to the way your staff communicates with patients so you can suggest better ways to discuss difficult subjects like overdue payments? Many patients prefer the computer to the telephone. Do you accommodate them with secure email communication, or are you reluctant to try new technology? Face-to-face communication remains the most important way to communicate with patients. Make sure that you and your staff listen carefully, look people in the eye, and respond respectfully to each and every patient and family member.
2. **Use patient satisfaction surveys to obtain patient feedback on your practice.** You and your staff may think that your practice operations meet patient needs, but your patients may feel otherwise. At least four times each year, ask their opinion of both administrative and clinical systems in your practice. Address their concerns and tell them how you respond to their suggestions. If you would like to be part of an on-line patient satisfaction system that gives you access not only to feedback from your own patients but to the ratings of other practices, check out [DrScore.com](http://DrScore.com), a company based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.
3. **Benchmark your practice with other practices of your size and specialty.** How do you compare with other practices of your size and specialty? One way to find out is to benchmark your performance. MGMA and your specialty society are good resources.
4. **Develop and use a Web site.** In this day and age, a practice Web site is an essential, not an optional method for communicating with patients. You have several options. If you are a minimalist, you can post general information about your practice such as office location(s), driving directions, information about clinicians, insurance plans that you accept, and medical conditions that you regularly treat. If you want to do more, you can create a Web portal that allows patients to communicate with you in a secure fashion. Patients first create

a user name and password. They then use the Web to request appointments, download and complete information forms (e.g., demographic data, Review of Systems), request test results, request prescription renewals, pay bills on-line, and obtain educational information that is specific to your practice. Some software vendors offer the patient portal as an optional feature. If your vendor does not offer the portal, you can purchase it as a stand-alone product.

5. **Develop a patient newsletter.** A patient newsletter is an easy way to keep your practice fresh in patients' minds, even when they are not coming for a visit. Include updates about seasonal health issues and reminders about preventive care (e.g., flu shots or camp physicals). Use the newsletter to highlight new services that your practice offers, professional accomplishments, community activities of clinical and administrative staff, and educational materials that you recommend. Electronic solutions make the production and distribution of newsletters easy and inexpensive.
6. **Reach out to your community.** Reach out to your community in several ways. First, volunteer to support health-related causes by participating in events sponsored by your local hospital or other non-profit organizations. Second, seek out opportunities to describe one or more of your services to interested groups. Local Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, health clubs, religious organizations, and other community groups may be delighted to have you as a guest speaker for one of their events. Regardless of your specialty, timing is everything, so consider tying your program to an appropriate month of the year. For example, in January, weight loss and healthy eating are popular topics. In February, heart health is the focus. March, at least in North Carolina, should be sports injury month.

**OUR SINCERE THANKS  
FOR YOUR BUSINESS AND SUPPORT DURING 2008.**

**IN YOUR HONOR, WE HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO  
THE NORTH CAROLINA MEDICAL SOCIETY FOUNDATION,  
THE NORTH CAROLINA PEDIATRIC SOCIETY FOUNDATION, AND  
THE LUCY DANIELS FOUNDATION.**

**HAVE A HAPPY AND HEALTHY HOLIDAY SEASON!**

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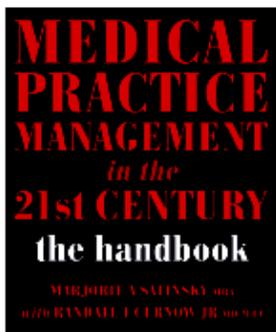
## Upcoming Presentations

- December 12/13, 2008** **Tips for Recruiting and Hiring the Right People for Your Practice**  
**Tips for Retaining a Great Staff**  
Cosmetic Surgery Bootcamp  
Las Vegas, NV
- February 7, 2009** **Purchasing and Implementing an EHR System**  
North Carolina Association of Eye Physicians and Surgeons  
Greensboro, NC
- May 2, 2009** **Selecting and Implementing IT Solutions to Support Your Psychiatric Practice**  
North Carolina Psychiatric Association  
Chapel Hill, NC



## New Year's Resolution Time Is Just Around the Corner...

If you are looking for new ideas to improve your bottom line and practice operations, order **The Handbook for Medical Practice Management in the 21st Century**. The book and the companion Web site offer concrete suggestions and practical tools. Authored by Marjorie A. Satinsky, M.B.A., with Randall T. Curnow, Jr., M.D., M.B.A., the handbook is available from Radcliffe Press. To order the book, call 800.247.6553 or visit [www.radcliffe-oxford.com](http://www.radcliffe-oxford.com)



- **Dr. Mark A. Crissman of Crissman Family Practice in Graham, NC explains:**

“What truly sets this book apart from other practice management books for physicians is that it does not stop with having developed a plan. It offers powerful, practical, and useful strategies for implementing a plan, even in established practices such as mine.”

- **Here's what Dr. Robert S. Galvin, Director of Global Healthcare for General Electric (GE), says about the handbook:**

“Medical Practice Management in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is written for the busy practitioner – clear, concise, and practical without any wasted space. I wish I had had this resource when I was starting practice. It's the bible for practice management, just as the Washington Manual was in earlier years.”

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