Market Aesthetic Services by Highlighting Expertise

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WASHINGTON — The dermatologists who successfully add aesthetic services to their practices are those who use their expertise to show patients that they are the safe, smart choice, Catherine Maley said at the annual meeting of the American Academy for Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

"Aesthetic dermatology is the business of feelings and emotions," said Ms. Maley, president of Cosmetic Image Marketing, a San Francisco–based marketing, public relations, and advertising firm that specializes in helping physicians build aesthetic practices.

"What you want to do is differentiate yourself from the medispas," she pointed out. A dermatologist competing in the aesthetic market should emphasize his or her medical training so patients recognize that they are paying for expertise.

"The aesthetic patient needs to understand that you are not the cheapest: You are the best," she said.

"Think of the psychology of the aesthetic patient. The bottom line is that she wants to look and feel better but she wants peace of mind. She wants to know that she is not going to regret anything and she is going to get a good result every time," Ms. Maley said.

Don't try to compete with medispas on price. Instead, sell the value. "You want those preferred patients who care about safety and credibility," she said.

How do dermatologists sell value? By emphasizing their credentials.

Use the logo from every society to which you belong on your cards, flyers, and promotional materials, including hospital and school affiliations. Put those logos everywhere because it enhances credibility with patients. "If you are board certified, say so in your promotional materials and explain to patients just what that means in terms of extra training," Ms. Maley said.

"If you work with vendors, use those affiliations and let patients know that you have been called on to speak or do research or train others," she added.

Create high-quality promotional handouts and cards to promote the aesthetic practice. A public relations agent can help create promotional materials, or there may be an interested and talented staff member who can design promotional pieces. Be sure to include patient photos and testimonials in your in-office and external promotional material. A dermatologist who is lucky enough to have a celebrity patient should ask for his or her permission to display a photo and short testimonial in the office.

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Use testimonials generously, Ms. Maley emphasized. Provide high-quality photo albums with patients from a range of ages and ethnic backgrounds. Create a "what our patients say about us" album for written thank-you notes, e-mails, or postprocedure surveys.

"It's very compelling for patients to read about how great you are from other patients, not just from you," Ms. Maley said. The more testimonials, the better. Patient survey data have shown that prospective aesthetic patients associate quantity of patient testimonials with experience and expertise. Consider taking videos of patients who want to share their positive experiences, and put the videos together on a loop to show in the waiting room or post them on a Web site, Ms. Maley suggested.

And don't underestimate the importance of appearing in print.

"Any time you publish or you are quoted, don't miss that opportunity for public relations," she said.

Pull together a collection of quotes and design a PR piece for patient information packets and for the practice's Web site. One way to get written about or interviewed is to send a media kit to local print and TV reporters and to follow up with a personal phone call to pitch story ideas related to your expertise.

"Remember that it is not about you. It is about what you can do for their readers and viewers," Ms. Maley cautioned. "But the PR can really pay off and set you up as an expert in your community." ■

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