THE OFFICE

Organize Your Samples—and Your Reps

verybody, it seems, thinks they have too many samples, but you really don't. What you have is too much

If you doubt this, take a good look at the next set of samples that comes into your

office. Each unit will probably consist of a big box or card, and somewhere within its depths, amid all the wasted space, will be a single tablet or 3-g tube.

All that space-wasting packaging is purposeful, of course. Bigger is better, after all, from a promotional standpoint. Bigger packages are more likely to be noticed, and there's more room for advertising. The marketing people figure that if they

use up all of your available sample space, you won't have room for their competition.

As a result, you probably have sample packages taking up two or three closets' worth of expensive square footage—with the samples themselves occupying perhaps 5% of that space or less.

Not only that, but each time you need a particular sample, somebody has to go hunting for it. Sometimes you find it, sometimes you don't. And when you do, there's a fair chance it's expired. It's a waste of time, space, and energy, and it's not necessary.

Here's what you do: Create a "parts-bin system" for your samples.

Have a carpenter build some shelving in a central area of the office. Stock those

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shelves with cardboard or plastic parts bins, which are available in a variety of lengths, widths, shapes, and colors from many different sources. Three online examples are www.anytimeproducts.com, www.papermart.com, and www.lkgood-

win.com. (As always, I have no financial interest in any product or service mentioned in this column.)

As samples come in, ask the representative who brings them to strip off all the space-wasting packaging, leaving only the tablet bubble-pack cards or the 3-g tubes. You'll be amazed at how much less space they take up. Store them in the bins, and arrange the bins on your shelving by whatev-

er organizational system you fancy. We do it alphabetically.

You'll always know what samples you have, what you're out of, and what's close to its expiration date. You and your staff will waste far less time searching for the samples you want, and you can use all that freed-up sample space for something far more likely to generate revenue for your of-

A parts-bin system could be an even bigger boon to your office if the Food and Drug Administration ever makes good on its recurrent promise to require written paper trails for all samples entering and leaving a facility. Periodic inventories, as well as logging samples in and out, will be far easier with my system.

While you're organizing your samples, organize your pharmaceutical reps too. Many offices allow representatives to come and go as they please, and too many physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners are all too willing to stop and chat with them, which disrupts efficient office flow. And if multiple reps show up in a single day, the chaos just multiplies.

Have your reps make appointments, just as your patients do. We allow only one rep appointment per day—during the lunch break, 10 minutes before the start of afternoon hours. That prevents disruption of the schedule, and it prevents me from chatting too long (which I have a tendency to do).

We also encourage reps not to make appointments at all unless they have something of significance to communicate. I'm happy to speak with reps, but not when all they have to offer is small talk.

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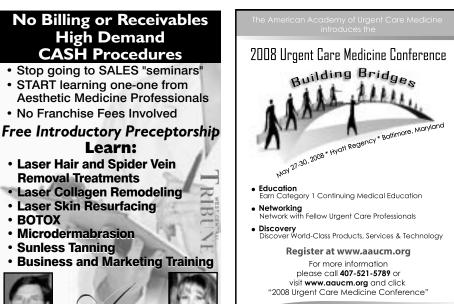


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