

Aesthetic Patients Can Help Practice Stay Afloat

BY FRAN LOWRY

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ORLANDO — Consider turning dermatology patients into aesthetic ones, to help stay afloat during these tough economic times.

Patients may come into your office needing a medical procedure, but will return for a cosmetic procedure if you educate them, said Dr. Mark S. Nestor, a dermatologist in private practice in Aventura, Fla.

Dr. Nestor said he always has educational videos for patients to watch as they sit in his waiting room. "A mother who brings her child in for acne treatment learns about cosmetic procedures that I do, and she will come back for

'If I had to give just one take-home message, it would be this: Inundate your patients with awareness of what you do.'

Botox. The thing is to start small, let your patients walk into it slowly, especially if they've never had aesthetic procedures," he said at the annual meeting of the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery.

Dr. Laurie J. Polis, who was part of a panel with Dr. Nestor that discussed dermatology marketing practices, suggested that a crucial part of the education process is to reassure patients about your expertise.

This can be done by displaying your diplomas and awards prominently on the wall, said Dr. Polis, a dermatologist in private practice in New York.

Developing good relationships with the media is also key to marketing and promoting your practice. You can spend money on advertising, or you can become known as an expert by being interviewed for magazine articles. "If you give good interviews ... and you get yourself quoted in an article, that will work better than any dollar that you can spend," Dr. Polis said.

Frame any articles and display them on your walls.

"If you are lucky enough to get editorial coverage, don't be shy. Make sure your patients know about it. It will make them proud of you," she said.

Keep in touch with your patients through regular e-mails and newsletters informing them of your services, Dr. Polis said.

"If I had to give just one take-home message, it would be this: Inundate your patients with awareness of what you do. Send e-mail blasts monthly or quarterly, whatever you are comfortable with. List all the things you do in your office. The worst thing to hear is, 'I didn't know you had a spa upstairs,' or 'I didn't know you did fillers and Botox,' so awareness is key," she said.

Keep these communications to patients educational, Dr. Polis said. "If they are educationally flavored, it does

not sound like a sales pitch. Instead, it opens up questions, inquiries, and interest, and that will lead to sales of those procedures."

Buff up your Web presence and use HTML so that you can be found on the Web. Also, make sure your Web site is listed on every letter and collateral you send out to patients.

First impressions are vital. Make sure your office environment conveys a pro-

fessional but relaxed and inviting atmosphere.

Pay attention to your office staff. Everyone connected with your practice—from your receptionists to your aestheticians—should be well spoken, well groomed, and polite.

"Remember that your patients are coming to you for an aesthetic service.

Pay attention to how your staff answers the phone. Are there messages

when patients and clients are on hold? How long are they on hold? Think about how you want to project yourself and your practice from the minute your patient walks into your office," she said.

Remember that tough economic times mean that advertising dollars are scarce. Now is a great time to negotiate for reduced rates with different advertising venues, from print to radio to TV, Dr. Polis advised. ■

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