



The Physician's Role in Occupational Health Sales and Marketing

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When it comes to sales and marketing, the involvement of a physician can make or break an occupational health initiative.

Physicians project credibility and can easily win the respect of employers and employees. In many cases, a sales effort can go "over the top" simply by bringing a physician into play.

I know many physicians who exude charm and would be an asset in virtually any sales scenario.

On the other hand, a physician who lacks "people skills" or who comes across as a know-it-all can easily alienate prospects and clients.

Consider these strategies:

■ **Know your market.** A market with unique workplace exposures suggests a need for greater physician presence. Likewise, a new program or one that is not the market leader may wish to use its physicians to win market share and play catch-up.

Many smaller markets are high-touch, person-to-person markets. For example, physician visibility is likely to have a greater impact in Pocatello (where everybody knows everybody) than in a metropolitan market like Chicago.

■ **Evaluate your sales strengths.** The effectiveness of your sales team impacts the role of the physician. Programs with a strong sales presence may find there is less need to use a physician in a sales role.

■ **Consider personality.** Physicians run the personality type gamut. If a physician is outgoing and an effective communicator, a program should encourage frequent trips to the workplace.



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On the other hand, many physicians are technically gifted but may be shy or lacking in people skills. In this instance, it is prudent to promote their technical expertise but keep their sales activity to a minimum.

■ **Define time commitment.** The desired degree of physician involvement should be spelled out in advance. A physician might participate in two worksite visits a week, for example. A dilemma for many programs involves using a physician in sales without simultaneously eroding their physician's finite clinical time.

Planning Physician Participation			
Activity	Weekly	Yearly	Hours
Workplace walkthrough	1	50	75
Sit in on weekly sales call	1	50	75
Check-in calls to current clients	2	100	25
Call "hot prospects"	2	100	25
Participate in quarterly telephone blitz	1 per quarter	4	1
Sign 1 set of letters	n/a	1	1
Annual Commitment: 205 hours or 4 hours per week			

■ **Establish parameters.** Most physicians know little about handling objections, articulating features and benefits, or how to close. The tendency is for a physician to go too far rather than not far enough in these areas, potentially jeopardizing a virtually completed sale.

A physician should visit the workplace to learn about working conditions and offer preliminary recommendations, not to sell.

The breadth of the physician's role in any given type of activity should be clearly defined.

■ **Hand pick prospects.** When scheduling a physician for a joint sales call, target those employers with high injury incidence rates, hazardous conditions, complex or unusual job functions, and/or a large workforce.

■ **Plan ahead.** Appropriate clinic personnel should call or

visit a company prior to the physician's visit in order to obtain a preliminary sketch of special problems, critical job tasks, and current health and safety practices.

- **Have the physician meet senior management.** Physician presence at the worksite provides an excellent opportunity to meet senior company management—if only briefly. Such a meeting may go a long way toward solidifying a sense of management commitment toward your program.
- **Emphasize planning.** The clinic–employer relationship is enhanced if it includes a long-term game plan. Physician involvement is an excellent opportunity to gauge the quality of a company's current plan and offer suggestions for developing a more appropriate plan.
- **Offer further contact.** The physician should conclude his visit with an invitation for the employer prospect to contact the physician as necessary. A clearly stated availability of physician time is a compelling feature to most employers.
- **Follow-up.** The physician should send a follow-up e-mail immediately after the visit. The e-mail should summarize key issues and recommendations, and provide a sense of

commitment to the employer.

- **Hire smart.** Many programs are so eager to hire an experienced occupational medicine physician that they overlook or minimize the “personality issue.” Place as much emphasis on personality, commitment, and heart, as technical credentials during the hiring process.
- **Market at the patient level.** Marketing to the individual worker is a crucial marketing strategy. The physician's proverbial “bedside manner” is a subtle yet crucial aspect of a program's image.
- **Consider the broader plan.** The physician should have input into, thoroughly understand, and embrace the occupational health program's broader marketing plan. ■

What's your story?

If you've experienced success with an occupational medicine program, tell us about it in an e-mail to editor@jujm.com. We'll share it with your colleagues in an upcoming issue.

“Search others for their virtues,
thysself for thy vices.”

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), American author, diplomat, inventor, printer, scientist, and Founding Father

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