



Occupational Health Sales and Marketing as a Team Sport

■ FRANK H. LEONE, MBA, MPH

A thinly veiled secret in most urgent care clinics is the marginal role that sales and marketing plays in the mores of these organizations. Indeed, healthcare sales professionals tend to be like your Uncle Fred: it's always nice to see him, but he's not really woven into the inner fabric of your family.

Why?

To a large extent, urgent care owners have a hard time merging the healthcare side of their clinic(s) with the business side. And nothing seems to embody the "business side" of healthcare more than sales and marketing, which even in traditional businesses is often viewed as the non-serious, expense account, triple martini side of the business.

Your first step in addressing this problem is to redefine what sales and marketing really is—and what it is not. Forget the "let's make a deal" image often associated with sales; define sales as the vehicle that educates prospective consumers on the virtues of your clinic.

Rule #1: Keep things in perspective. Your clinic staff need not be actively involved in day-to-day sales and marketing in order to contribute. Dedicated sales and marketing staff should be responsible for 95% to 98% of all such activity. It is within this other 2% to 5% that involves team members that a clinic can catapult itself from just another clinic to one that is firing on all cylinders.

Rule #2: Define real responsibilities. A bit of cheerleading in a staff meeting ("Let's all get involved in sales and marketing this year! Rah, rah!") won't get the job done. Rather, each team member should have specific responsibilities defined within the context of his or her skills, personality, and the particular

needs of the team as a whole.

Rule #3: Be realistic about team members' strengths.

Another way to put it might be, don't ask somebody to do something they either don't want to do or simply are unlikely to do well.

I often hear the phrase "I need to get one of our physicians out to the workplace more often." Realize, however, that some docs wow and woo employers, others are just okay, and others exhibit interpersonal skills that may prove to be counterproductive to the sales and marketing effort.

Using a Physician for Sales and Marketing

Invariably, employers love to meet, talk on the phone with, and have physicians visit with them at their workplace. What can an urgent care clinic do to ensure that the physician makes the most of their time?

1. Be prepared to ask certain questions and show genuine interest in an employer's workplace.
2. Know what employers really want to hear and be certain to get these points across during every encounter.

Carefully crafted questions indicate that the physician has a genuine interest in the nuances of the employer's workplace. On a sales call, the physician should ask questions such as:

- "What seems to be your biggest health and safety challenge at this company?"
- "How have you addressed these challenges in the recent past?"
- "In a perfect world, what kind of relationship would your company like to have with a clinic such as ours?"

Physicians should position themselves as company-oriented caregivers (assuming full clinical integrity, of course) by learning to look prospects and clients in the eye and say something along the lines of the following:

"I practice occupational medicine because I enjoy working with others to address the big picture: getting workers back to work quickly and safely, addressing environmental concerns as



Frank Leone is president and CEO of RYAN Associates and executive director of the National Association of Occupational Health Professionals. Mr. Leone is the author of numerous sales and marketing texts and periodicals, and has considerable experience training medical professionals on sales and marketing techniques. E-mail him at fleone@naohp.com.

they may exist, and working closely with companies to develop a plan for optimal workplace health and safety. Toward this end, I try to ensure that we are always on the same page regarding what is best for your company and your employees, both individually and collectively.”

Get Everyone in the Game

A clinic’s marketing staff and physician(s) are only a part of the larger team. Everyone on the team, from senior management through the receptionist(s), should understand that they have a vital contribution to make. The best way to communicate these roles is by listing them as part of a clinic’s marketing plan.

Teamwork in Action: Sales/Marketing Responsibilities

As noted previously, it is important that each team member understand his or her role in the clinic’s sales and marketing efforts. Expectations should vary based on each individual’s respective strengths and weaknesses, but the following may be a good starting point:

Owner

- Articulate the true value and purpose of the clinic’s occupational health program.
- Make at least one phone call per quarter on behalf of the program.

Physician

- Participate in one sales call per week.
- Articulate your personal philosophy as an occupational health physician.
- Succinctly articulate the value of your program’s interventions.
- Participate in clinic tours by asking the “right questions” when meeting visiting employers.

Clinic Coordinator

- Participate in periodic sales calls.
- Succinctly articulate the value of your clinic’s interventions.
- Develop and execute a carefully plan clinic tour.

Receptionist

- Ask the right questions, take clinic tour visitors through a prototype registration process, and routinely point out patient flow attributes as important.

Help is closer than you might think and many, if not all, of your coworkers and employees have something to offer—if only you would ask.

Be certain to make occupational sales and marketing a true team sport. It’s the best way to assure a winning record. ■

do a take-back in this way. It sounds as though they have changed their rules for coding and are now trying to retroactively apply the new rules. You may need to contact a lawyer to see if you have a legal case to prevent the payor from applying new rules to old claims.

Usually, we try to use this type of a move by a payor as an opportunity to get a face-to-face meeting to explain:

- The *benefits* that the payor receives from after-hours care:
 - Marketing to employers (i.e., we include quality urgent care providers).
 - Making their most profitable members (i.e., the walking well that utilize very few healthcare resources) happy with their coverage.
 - Reduced emergency department visits.
- The additional costs that your urgent care incurs by providing after-hours care:
 - Wages; we must pay more than typical primary care where hours are 9-5, Monday through Friday.
 - Down time occurs when you are open—and paying staff—even when no patients come through the door, which can occur for hours at a time. When primary care practices have no scheduled visits, they can simply close up shop.
 - Staffing to rush: Due to non-scheduled visits, an urgent care center needs to slightly overstaff so that unacceptable delays do not occur during unexpected rushes of patients.

Then we tell the payor that there are many different ways for the payor to reimburse urgent care centers for these added expenses. Payors sometimes use S9088, 99051, problem-based coding (PBC), a fee schedule at about 120% of primary care fee schedule, or some other method.

The key issue is that we need a mutually beneficial way to continue the relationship. They want urgent care centers to serve their clients, and urgent care centers need adequate reimbursement to pay the electric bill. ■

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