

Ten Top Tips...

Promoting your wound care centre



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In many countries, health care is largely provided by private sector businesses. Elsewhere, traditionally state-run health services are currently undergoing a shift – not least due the burden of providing care for aging populations – towards the provision of specific health

services by the private sector (see, for example, physiotherapy and podiatry in the UK).^[1]

Whether in an existing private health provider environment, or part of a system that is evolving towards it, clinicians can play an important role in promoting their service. Engaging with both other healthcare professionals (i.e. referrers) and patients directly, the clinician in the private sector is a key player in helping drive the promotion of their specialism and ensuring a steady stream of referrals and patients. In view of this demand, the author – Director of PR and Marketing at Wound Care Advantage, a company based in Los Angeles, California, that specialises in managing wound care clinics and hospitals across the USA – provides ten top tips for promoting a wound care service.

1 START WITH A PLAN

In most wound centres the basic building block of treatment is a detailed patient care plan outlining a personalised care plan and treatment goals. This same concept should be the foundation of marketing a wound care clinic: when it comes to marketing campaigns, strategic planning is as important as the execution. Some elements of the marketing plan may be able to be achieved in-house, while others may be outsourced.

2 USE GRAPHICS AND PRINT MATERIALS

Graphics and print materials remain a valuable source of information for both patients and

referring physicians. Surveys of healthcare professionals reveal that 95% of specialist clinics use printed handouts for their patients. To supplement the handout, 82% refer their patients to credible websites.^[2]

A strong brand identity that integrates creative graphics and readable print materials establishes trust and professionalism with potential patients and referring primary care clinicians. The basic materials you should have in your centre include: patient guides, inpatient rack cards, appointment cards, and treatment-specific brochures.

3 CREATE A REFERRING PARTNER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Getting patients through the door of a wound centre can be challenging, especially if primary care clinicians are hesitant to refer patients. Spending time to build strong relationships with referring clinicians is one of the most effective ways to increase overall volume of a centre.

It is important to reassure these clinicians that wound care is a specialty and not a replacement for primary care. Marketing pieces should clearly communicate that once healed, patients will return to their primary care clinician. This helps to build a strong programme where the individuals that are referring are partners, not competitors.

4 STRONG PR GOES FAR BEYOND THE PRESS RELEASE

Behind every company there is a story of the road they have travelled and this story can be used as a foundation for personalisation of a centre. Reporters do not want fluff; they want to see real results, people, and numbers. Meaning comes from what is said about the centre, not what the centre says about itself. Wound centres should show, not tell.

In addition to personalising the story and focusing on results, it is also important to build relationships at the local level. Networking

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and building strong relationships within the industry, sub-industries and media is key. Public relations should never be just the press release. Writing and distributing the release is important, but centres must focus on the key components of the message that will ultimately reach the public.

5 VIDEO IS PERFECT FOR WOUND CENTRE MARKETING

The visual, easy-to-consume components of video marketing make it ideal for promoting wound centres. According to the Pew Research Centre,^[3] 72% of US Internet users say that they have searched for health information online. Video is slowly becoming an expectation for many patients who prefer images and graphics to traditional text information. Wound centres should take full advantage of video for patient outreach and advocacy.

With advancements in HD video, it is easier and cheaper to create videos about your wound care team and programmes than ever before.

6 LIST BUILDING

With the massive explosion of patient data it is important to collect contact information of your patients for marketing purposes. However, the patients must opt-in to marketing to avoid problems with spam and adhere to patient privacy laws. Patients with chronic wounds often have recurring wounds, meaning they are likely going to be repeat patients. Clinic staff should seek professional advice when it comes to patient list building, to maintain a strong relationship with both current and former patients. Email addresses can be used for email blasts and driving patients and caregivers to a centre's social media channels to help them feel connected.

7 HAVE A PLAN FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

There has never been a better time for wound centres to be actively networking on social media sites. However, common sense must be used whenever you are communicating online. Be conscious of patient privacy, local governance, and ensure that your wound centre has an ongoing process for maintaining your social media pages.

Each social media platform can provide your wound centre with different marketing opportunities. Wound centres should develop their own presence on social media sites, regardless of their hospital system's pages.

Facebook is great for telling your story and interacting with your potential patient base on a local level, while Twitter is an excellent way to find people in your area and drive them to your Facebook page. Google+ has value for search engine optimisation purposes to get patients to your wound centre's website.

8 ENCOURAGE PATIENT REVIEWS

Today, patients look to the Internet before choosing their healthcare service providers. They want verification from the community that a provider is honest and capable. Online reviews provide a two-way window for both doctors and patients to keep an eye on practice strengths and areas that could be improved.

Many clinicians fear online patient reviews, but even a negative review is an opportunity to publicly respond and show that you care. Last year, *Forbes Magazine*^[4] covered this topic, stating that clinicians should embrace reviews and actually encourage them. However, if the majority of online reviews are negative you need to invest more time figuring out why patients are not satisfied with your care.

9 CREATE A BLOG AND UPDATE IT WEEKLY

Blogs are a great way of keeping wound care patients informed of the services that your centre offers. A blog is a valuable resource to educate your audience about how nonhealing wounds start and how they can be healed with advanced treatments. Blogs are also a great vehicle for posting case studies, graphics, videos, and other vital marketing information. Blogging is an effective way to use context-heavy keywords to create content for your social media channels and increase your website's search engine presence. In general, aim for one engaging post per week.

10 WHEN IN DOUBT, HIRE AN EXPERT

Marketing a wound clinic is hard work that encompasses many components and hours. Ensuring that clinicians are engaged in this important process should not be at the expense of their clinical commitments. Outsourcing marketing efforts to experts can be helpful. For many centres, this may be the most efficient route as it allows your centre to focus on what it does best, which is heal wounds and care for patients. ■

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Expert commentary

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Setting up a wound centre is a daunting task for any clinician. The move from the familiar, comfortable way of working (which may not necessarily be the most efficient or effective) to a streamlined mechanism of service delivery with clear goals and measurable outcomes raises many challenges.

Perhaps the most obvious challenge is being certain that there is a need for the service; all too frequently, new services are developed without thought being given to the population size or density, or the logistics of how the service will be accessed. No wound healing centre can deliver great outcomes if it does not have patients. Therefore, relationship building, advertising, and setting clear referral criteria are crucial, both to success and also to measuring what has been achieved.

Around the globe, healthcare resources are becoming more and more constrained as the population ages and develops increasing levels of disease, such as diabetes, and lifestyle problems, such as obesity, all of which increase the likelihood of developing and living with wounds. Wound healing service delivery needs to reflect that people are developing chronic wounds at a younger age and have to manage their health care around the competing demands of family and work. The care and management of these patients needs to deliver outcomes within short time frames, or – when this is not possible – discuss with the patient and their primary provider (and, if relevant, funder of care) suitable treatment pathways for achieving realistic goals. This becomes much easier when care is focussed and delivered by a single, committed team.

Throughout the world, patients continue to have wounds without ever having a proper assessment or tailored management plan. Wound care may be delivered by well-meaning clinicians who are actually not skilled in wound management. It stands to reason that centralising wound care in a well-resourced, private facility that delivers evidence-based care can improve patient outcomes, reduce costs and resource usage, as well as improve quality of life for patients (and staff who find positive outcomes rewarding!).

Nicola Walker's Ten Top Tips brings a PR industry perspective on establishing a wound care centre that is effective in recruiting patients and sharing its successes. Clinicians working in these centres have an important role to play in this process: their expertise and the positive outcomes they achieve become the core of the message that will draw in new patients and encourage referrals from colleagues in other services. An example of striving for excellence in service delivery from the UK, is the recently published guidelines for practice on Optimising Venous Leg Ulcer Services in a Changing NHS.⁽¹⁾ This document offers a framework to guide clinicians who have identified the need to develop a new service or to improve an existing one. Whether delivering care in the public or private sector, high-quality, efficient care – both financially and from a patient perspective – is key.

Fully engaging in the service delivery process can be challenging, and it should be acknowledged that there are many creative, innovative, and knowledgeable clinicians working within systems that constrain their ability to deliver the care they know would be best for their patients as they compete against higher profile diseases, different agendas, cost constraints, red tape, and the need to "tick boxes".

Not all patients want, or are able, to attend a wound healing centre, but for those who do, these centres may offer a beacon of hope. They can provide patients with wounds the chance to work with a team of multidisciplinary clinicians all focused on wound healing, and who have the freedom to do just that! ■

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