



# Want More Patients? Focus on Your Maintenance Plan

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It may seem obvious that all practitioners want more patients. But is there a secret to successful and thriving healthcare businesses? How can you keep your practice growing at a steady pace? How can you turn an urgent panic of “I need to get more patients!” into a long-term strategy that continues to work for you? One may argue a prosperous practice lies within its effective maintenance program.

## **What are aspects of a successful maintenance plan?**

Maintenance of patients can be one of the most important aspects to push engagement and improve your referral program. Not only can a maintenance plan increase the likelihood of patient satisfaction within your practice, but it can also increase the number of patients joining your programs and boosts your ability to expand patient re-engagement. When implemented, maintenance plans also increase patient successes through accountability and increased goal setting.

### **Keeping patients engaged:**

After a patient loses weight or achieves success through your health programs, it is important to keep them coming back and returning to invest in your products and services.

Creating games, contests, or challenges are a great way to engage patients and increase your service revenue through past patient re-engagement. Competitions drive patients to engage with the practitioner and use other patients' success as motivation to achieve new goals. Group settings also allow for patients to share experiences and learn from one another's successes and failures.

Additionally, providing special guest webinars or workshops for patients is a great way to offer additional educational materials and push patient engagement in services that generate revenue for your programs. Not only will this increase your patient engagement, but it is a great opportunity to form agreements with other practitioners for you to do the same in their maintenance programs, which may generate new patients for you and your colleagues.

Other opportunities for engagement may be through offering additional testing services to enhance greater weight loss. Some examples include body fat percentage testing, bone density

testing, or gut health testing. These additional assessments may push patients to reach past their initial goals and achieve better health outcomes.

### **Always have a goal:**

Using SMART goals within appointments assists patients' confidence by continuing to build on their small goals and allowing for more growth between sessions. SMART goals guide goal setting and help patients achieve goals, which may increase engagement and retention. SMART goals can allow for accountability with you, the practitioner, which then increases trust and retention.

### An example of a SMART goal is:

Specific - I am going to increase my physical activity by walking.

Measurable - I am going to increase my physical activity by walking for 30 minutes after dinner.

Attainable - I am going to increase my physical activity by walking for 30 minutes after dinner 4-5 times a week.

Realistic - I am going to increase my physical activity by walking for 30 minutes after dinner 4-5 times a week, and at least 3-4 times during the weekdays.

Timely - I am going to increase my physical activity by walking for 30 minutes after dinner 4-5 times a week for the next month.



Using this outline for goal setting sets attainable goals for patients and to not become overwhelmed by too many lifestyle changes at once. SMART goals have been shown to be effective and improve patient engagement in their own behavior changes. Each time a goal is achieved, another goal can be created, and another appointment can be booked.

### **Increase patient referrals:**

You will want to continue to engage with past patients to increase the likelihood of their referral to others within their personal network who may be in need of your services. This can be done through asking former patients for reviews via email or through end of service surveys. By allowing referrals to recruit new patients to your practice, your time can be spent improving care rather than marketing your services. This strategy also allows for patient re-engagement as past patients may reflect on their experience with you and seek more of your services. Asking for referrals is a great time to ask for feedback from patients as well! Be sure to give patients the information they need for referrals including a good email and phone number you check often.

### **Using online presence to engage with your audience:**

Growing your online presence only helps you reach a wider audience, but it also allows for past patients to share their experience with your services for others to see. Testimonials can be shared on your website, and ratings and reviews can be measured through different feedback websites, such as Yelp or Google Reviews. Both will increase patient referrals and are free. Then by responding to reviews, you show prospective clients that you are willing to engage in an online presence, meet people where they are at, and engage in a way that is easy and attainable for them anywhere.

Although word of mouth referrals are the most solid in terms of patient engagement, they just aren't enough to grow your business anymore especially in virtual practices as this limits the scope to which you can reach patients. You may want to increase your businesses' social media presence through other channels such as Linked In, Facebook/Instagram, and Twitter to broaden the scope of your audience. By using an online presence to engage with your current and future patients you increase the accessibility to your services, which will generate more revenue in the long run.

### **Maintain an online scheduling platform and messaging center:**

By allowing patients to schedule their appointments online, you will save valuable time for you and your patients. Some platforms will even allow for appointment reminders and email or text confirmation notices, increasing patient retention and decreasing the likelihood for cancellations. The same platform may also have an online messaging center for patients to easily communicate with you and allows for you to check-in with your patients to increase the retention of the care you are providing. One necessary key for your online platform is to ensure easy navigation on your website. Quick and easy access to your content and services is key in your website design. A great website is not only attractive to the eye, but also simple for patients to operate so the population you are able to reach is not limited by the ability for patients to use technology.

As a practitioner, you want to help your patients achieve their goals, be a partner in their successes, and continue to build your business along the way. Implementing a successful maintenance plan can assist you in managing all of those things with ease. By narrowing your focus to your maintenance plan, the reach of your practice will broaden, patients will be more satisfied with your services, and they are more likely to refer their friends and family to you as well.

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About the Author:

Katie Chapmon, MS, RD is a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist specializing in Bariatric Nutrition, GI Issues and Hormonal Health and with 10+ years of hands-on clinical experience for leading medical providers. She is the proud recipient of the 2010 Recognized Young Dietitian of the Year Award and 2018 Excellence in Weight Management Practice Award through the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

She spent the first decade of her career as the lead dietitian for Kaiser Permanente Southern California. For the past several years, she has been working with industry partners and consumers to improve nutrition education within the field and maintains a virtual private practice. In April 2021, she launched Bariatric Nutrition Pro – to provide healthcare practitioners education to start (or continue!) their bariatric career with the confidence and knowledge to succeed.

She is a past Chair of the American Society of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Integrated Health Clinical Issues Committee and Chapter author of the 3rd Edition of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Pocket Guide to Bariatric Surgery. She is a national speaker and enjoys time hiking and cooking in the kitchen.