

Network Your Referral Sources

Never separate yourself from the community.— Hillel

by Adam D. Bishop, MBA

Why Clients Refer

- 1. They trust that you will follow up and make them feel good about making the referral.**
- 2. They think you are fair and competent.** People who refer Home Care clients require a sense of security and trust. They must feel that the patient will be well taken care of.
- 3. You are convenient and easily accessible.** People today like things quick and easy. They want to be able to call one number, not be placed on hold, and be able to get immediate attention. If you can treat referrals as high priority, the response from referral sources will be very positive.
- 4. Reciprocity is very important.** Setting up mutual referral systems is a quick, easy and professional way to generate more referrals.

Why People Don't Refer

- 1. They think you are too busy and that you will not be able to give their client the attention they need.**
- 2. They think you are too expensive.** Tell them your rates and explain why your rates are in the “high-average” fee range. Stress the importance of attracting and retaining qualified home care staff and what services are included in your fees. Educate them. Although people say they look to low price first, psychologically they are afraid of it for fear that quality will be compromised.
- 3. It never occurred to them to refer.** Plant the seeds in their mind that you welcome referrals and stress that you will not disappoint them or compromise their credibility by referring patients to you.
- 4. They are afraid to be responsible for a referral that would reflect poorly on their judgment.** Work hard at increasing their confidence in you. Share testimonials or responses from existing client questionnaires.
- 5. They have had a previous negative experience with one of your competitors.** Find out as much as possible from your potential referral sources about what they did not like about other Home Care companies they have dealt with. You will have to convince potential referral sources why they should trust you and your staff, and why they should do business with you.

Marketing to Referral Sources

Do it right or don't do it! Identify all of your current referral sources. Make a list of all potential referral sources in your community, including:

- **Physicians**
- **Case Managers**
- **Social Workers**
- **Discharge Planners**
- **Directors of Care, Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities**
- **Trust Officers**
- **Seniors Organizations**
- **Ministers**
- **Volunteer Organizations** (*i.e. Meals on Wheels*)
- **Local and State politicians**
- **Funeral Home Directors**

Develop a strategic networking plan with input from your key management staff. Identify links or contacts with each of these referral groups. Identify all community and state associations and determine the value of attending meetings and workshops. Develop a plan of who should represent your company at these meetings.

Position your company as a resource to the community when it comes to Home Care services. Provide information not only about your services but also about industry statistics, regulations, new trends, etc. Develop a package of information that you can provide to these contacts. Send copies of newsletters, press releases, brochures or industry information on a regular basis. This will set you apart from other companies.

This is the essence of effective networking—helping others. This is one of the fastest ways to cultivate productive relationships. When you help others you will get much more in return.

Be sure your staff members know that client referral sources are essential to the future of your business, so they will give them proper recognition and attention. Give acknowledgment in newsletters and memos to employees who refer clients to your agency.

Ways to Encourage Clients, Staff and Friends to Refer

- 1. Ask them!** Develop your own technique, with which you feel most comfortable.
- 2. Reward referrals.** Thank employees with a dinner-for-two, flowers, fruit baskets, etc. Send thank you letters, or call referral sources and thank them for trusting your company. Try to send an unusual card, that will be saved or displayed, with your name, logo, address, and phone number in full view. Or give them a magnet or coffee mug with your logo. They will look at it every day.
- 3. Keep in touch with referral sources and let them know how the person whom they referred to you is progressing under your care.**
- 4. Refer business to them.** Everyone likes to feel that he or she is getting what he or she wants or needs. For example: if you are getting referrals from an Assisted Living Facility, ask if you could have your nursing staff visit the facility for the purpose of orientating your staff. Often facilities will rely on Home Care staff to refer or endorse Nursing Homes or Assisted Living Facilities.
- 5. Believe in your quality and service level.** If you don't commit to quality, why should anyone refer you?
- 6. Seek out referrals from competitors.** Some of your best referrals can come from your apparent “competitors.” For example: other Home Care companies may not be able to fill the shifts or service a particular geographic area. If you can set up reciprocal referring relationships, you may be surprised how much this can help your business.