

“LOST” PATIENTS MAY WELCOME A PHONE CALL APPOINTMENT INVITATION

Finding patients who have drifted, through the help of complementary patient reactivation programs, buoys an already burgeoning eye care practice.

BY ROCHELLE NATALONI, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



Increased efficiency is to an ophthalmology practice's bottom line what improved outcomes are to its reputation—priceless. In the case of Matossian Eye Associates (MEA), using specialty services to augment its in-house patient callback and patient reactivation efforts has significantly boosted the efficiency and success of this already thriving practice.

PATIENT REACTIVATION SOFTWARE

About 3 years ago, MEA began using the Brevium Patient Reactivation Software program (www.brevium.com and www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoEXUmabf3M) to extend its efforts to contact patients who remained in the database but had not been seen within an appropriate amount of time. According to Cynthia Matossian, MD, the eponymous founder of the 30-year-old practice with three sites in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, her practice engaged Brevium because it simplifies and speeds the process of making calls. “Brevium doesn't make the calls; it just makes it quicker and easier for our staff to,” she said.

“The software program identifies patients who our staff should call, and as each call is made, a new patient file quickly comes up on the computer screen. The program even keeps track of which employee made the call,” Dr. Matossian continued. The program also tracks if a voice message is left, if the patient responds to the voice message, if the patient makes an appointment—and importantly—if the patient actually follows through and shows up for the appointment.

KEEPING APPOINTMENTS

Practice Administrator Brad Botelho says keeping the appointment is what it is all about. “Making an appointment is one thing. Getting the patient back through the

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doors is where the challenge lies,” he remarks. Brevium helps with this challenge by dramatically increasing the odds. The software program performs a nightly search and identifies patients to put on the daily call roster based on the practice's specific criteria. Everything about the patient is located on one screen including demographics, billing status, physician, preferred location, and appointment history. When the MEA staffer makes the call, the results are recorded with a few mouse clicks, and the next patient appears on the screen.

MAKING THE CALLS

Approximately 10 MEA employees—give or take depending on staffing issues—have the seemingly Herculean task of making 2,500 calls per month to inactive patients. That is approximately 20 calls per employee per day. The software not only makes it doable, but it makes it profitable for the practice and rewarding for employees. Mr. Botelho says, “We incentivize our employees to reach or exceed this goal by putting them in groups and giving award gift cards or other prizes— but only if the entire group reaches its goals.” Last year, he said MEA had its best year ever, financially speaking, and in part owes this milestone to the number of patients that the Brevium program helped reactivate. “Last year, we brought back more than

double the number of patients that we would have been able to do without the system," he said. "It's been enormously beneficial."

GETTING PATIENTS BACK

In 2014, in excess of 30,000 Brevium-assisted calls were made by MEA employees. From those calls, approximately 2,500 appointments were made, and of those appointments, 2,100 were kept. "That's about an 80% to 85% success rate of getting the patients back in the door," says Mr. Botelho.

The practice has 14 ophthalmologists and optometrists working either full or part time. To accommodate the anticipated influx of patients, an additional optometrist was brought on board to bring the total to five ODs, and several of the general ophthalmologists and ophthalmic subspecialists have expanded their hours, adding early morning and/or evening slots. "We made sure we were prepared for the increase in patient volume, because the worst thing a practice can do is spend money to bring patients in and not have any place to put them," said Dr. Matossian.

While some practices enlist the services of patient recovery programs because profits are slipping away through patient loss, no such problem existed at MEA according to Dr. Matossian. Incorporating Brevium into the practice management paradigm was a proactive effort to stay one step ahead, and it has paid off handsomely. "To be a successful business, you don't wait for a problem to happen and react to it by trying to solve it," she says. "We have always been proactive and consequently successful. We have always had a traditional system in place of having our employees call patients who hadn't been back for a number of years, but because our practice has become larger, it was no longer feasible for my staff to be tied up for so many hours per week making these calls."

COMPLEMENTARY CALLING

In addition to Brevium, which has more than adequately proved profitable to MEA, the practice recently incorporated the use of OptiCall (www.opticall.com), another company that helps capture "lost" patients. OptiCall actually partners with Brevium to optimize patient recovery. The difference is that OptiCall employees actually make the calls.

For the past few months, MEA has used OptiCall's Boomerang program to reach out to patients who have been inactive for 1 or more years. Among the program's benefits are that it monitors, measures, and reports results including the number of patients recovered, the amount of revenue generated, the number of calls attempted, whether and when to call patients again, and if (and why) patients have changed providers or died since their last visit.

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MEA practice administrator

"We use OptiCall to reach out to inactive general eye care patients for their annual exams, as opposed to, for instance, retina patients who have more specific needs," points out Mr. Botelho. "We have plenty of patients who need to be called for yearly eye exams, and this is an extremely cost-effective way of reaching them."

HIDDEN PERKS

Capturing patients who have drifted is not all about the bottom line. There are other advantages, and the patients benefit from them as much as the practice. "It's really surprising and gratifying to see how many patients are happy to come back," says Dr. Matossian. "You know how life is—2 years have gone by, and patients keep putting off a phone call they know they need to make. So, they're often actually relieved to get a call from us, because it prompts them to follow through and make an appointment." This, she says, is especially helpful for patients with dry eye disease and glaucoma, who naturally need to be seen sooner rather than later to prevent further damage.

IN SUMMARY

Both Dr. Matossian and Mr. Botelho say it is too early to quantify the success of OptiCall, because it is too soon to know if patients who have made appointments will ultimately keep them. With Brevium, there is no question about its cost-effectiveness, because other than an initial set-up fee, its cost is based strictly on the number of patients who show up for appointments. There is only a charge to the practice when revenue is generated. "It's a win-win," says Dr. Matossian. "The practice literally has nothing to lose." ■

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