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Tips for Participating in Community Events

By Carrie Rossenfeld



Most physicians readily associate themselves with the medical community, through either their specialty or their affiliate hospital. But smart physicians remember that they're a part of the local community as well, and they need to nurture this status by participating in community events.

Taking part in community activities is not only great for local exposure, it's also an ideal way to network and to meet other leaders in the

community, says Neil B. Kirschen, M.D., medical director of the Pain Management Center of Long Island in Rockville Centre, N.Y. In addition, your participation allows organizers to include a variety of healthcare professionals in the event, adding a new dimension and draw to it.

Joining in community events also offers you a new way to connect with patients. "Our staff has the opportunity to engage with the population we serve in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, and the patient has the opportunity to meet their physicians and staff in an open environment in which communication and transparency are vital to establishing a long-term medical relationship," says Scott W. Disch, M.P.H., director of practice management for MetroWest Physician Services in Framingham, Mass.

"The community is our patients, and it is important for them to know that we care about them and want them to be safe in the sun," says Richard Craig Bezozo, M.D., president of MoleSafe USA, a preventative skin cancer screening clinic based in Millburn, N.J.

Which community events are best?

Since it simply isn't feasible or wise to take part in every event your community organizes, it makes sense to have a system for determining which events are best for your practice.

"What we look for in an event is that the event is spreading the word to the right community," Bezozo explains. "If you offer your services to an event that isn't related to your target audience, then both parties won't get the most out of their efforts."

Seminars, street fairs, postal food drives, targeted church events and farmers' markets are just some of the local events at which medical professionals recommend you have a presence. Healthcare-related events such as health fairs, blood drives and running, walking or cycling races are also ideal.

"It's also important to participate in events where booths are available to advertise and hand out pamphlets about the practice," Kirschen advises. Events where you can provide blood-pressure measurements, screenings

and other tests are great opportunities to market your practice.

Disch recommends analyzing the event's impact on the population's health, its return on investment to your practice, its match to the community health composition, branding opportunities for your practice, exposure to niche markets and the opportunity to ingrain yourself as a leader in the community before committing to an event. "Personally, I have found the events that are most successful are those in local towns, performed with grassroots organizations such as churches and other civic organizations," he says.

How can you get involved?

Getting involved in community events is easy.

To start, you can contact local organizations such as your Chamber of Commerce, Lions' Club and Rotary Club, since each group has a particular agenda and mission statement.

"It is best if the mission statement matches the practice's primary interest," says Kirschen. "Providing lectures or participating in their luncheon/dinner events are great ways to get the message out to their members."

You can also reach out to the public relations/marketing departments at your local hospitals and other organizations to find out how you can get involved. You may even want to host your own event, such as a drive-by flu vaccination program. Think outside the box to determine the most convenient way for the population to get educated, access your staff easily and engage them in the comfort of their surroundings, offers Disch.

"We look for organizations that have impacted the community in a major way," Bezozo notes. "This way, we can see the community response and reach out to the organization leaders."

You may want to call or sit down with the key people involved in the event and explain your services and how they can help the leading organization. Then, figure out a realistic amount of time and services you can donate.

Keep these things in mind when participating in community events:

Do your research before offering your services to make sure the organization meets the high standards that your practice does.

Be aware of how the community views the organization before getting on board.

Bring enough staff members with you to be able to answer questions and still offer your services to attendees. Some questions may not even be related to your specialty, so be sure to keep up with current trends in healthcare – it could help establish you as a local expert.

Be selective with your giveaway items and watch them closely as some people will help themselves to more than their share, says Susan M. Tellem, a Los Angeles-based nurse.

Sunglasses, tote bags, visors, water bottles and flash drives are great giveaways.

Know your audience, and gear any presentations, signage and giveaways to them.