

NEUROLOGY/SLEEP MEDICINE PRACTICE CASE STUDY

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EFFORTS RESULT IN A 78% INCREASE IN REFERRALS

A neurology-based sleep practice with attached diagnostic lab first signed on with Practice-Reps in April of 2008. The practice, with two sites based in the Southeast Pennsylvania suburbs, was founded more than 25 years ago and now staffs 4 board certified physicians in a competitive marketplace.

Despite its recognition as a leader in neurology, the core emphasis of this practice is sleep medicine, using a multi-specialty, comprehensive approach including neurology, bariatrics, internal medicine, and a dedicated CPAP education clinic.

The practice had tried various forms of marketing in the past; everything from television, radio, and print ads to brochures and even personal representation by a full-time physician liaison. Few of these efforts seemed to gain the necessary ROI to justify their cost over a two year period, and the administrator found it difficult to effectively manage their outside liaison.

While researching their current and past referrals via the Practice-Rep Survey System (which uses email and direct mail surveys, as well as personal meetings to gain insights into how practices are viewed by their referrers), we discovered that many referrers were sending patients to other local specialists for routine sleep screenings due to a less than clear understanding of the underlying causes and treatment options for sleep disorders. Many referrers sent patients to other practitioners who simply screened for sleep apnea and, once diagnosed, were fitted by a company representative for a CPAP device and sent home.

With **external marketing tools** such as branded fax referral forms and insurance acceptance guides, the Practice-Reps team went to work in the community, meeting with current, past, and potential new referral sources in an effort to survey perceptions while selling the concept of easy access to board certified sleep specialists who take a comprehensive approach to treating sleep disorders. Initially, our PCP reception was mixed as practitioners felt that all sleep centers treat sleep disorders the same way. After weeks and sometimes months of repeat visits and professional education, most practices began to realize that we were there to service them and the lines of communication opened up. Referrals soon followed.

Our external efforts of personal representation were soon reinforced and followed up with the introduction of proprietary marketing materials developed in a low-cost fashion by the Practice-Reps team of marketers. These materials emphasized the superior compliance rates of the CPAP clinic and their comprehensive approach to treating the full spectrum of sleep disorders via neurology and bariatric medicine. “Lunch and Learn” seminars and “open house” meetings, staffed by the Practice-Reps team, were held to promote the practice’s new satellite office.

Internally, Practice-Reps worked with the practice’s staff to improve patient relations on the phone and in-person to promote patient retention and internal referrals. We also developed new patient, employee, and referral newsletters and surveys for secure, electronic distribution at a very low cost. This allowed the practice to communicate with these three important groups on an on-going basis in an interesting, visually appealing format, complete with news, education, and announcements pertinent to each group, coupled with appropriate pictures, graphs, and logos.

No billboards, media, or traditional print ads of any kind were used in this campaign!

After ten months, the practice administrator tallied the results and discovered that our efforts had resulted in a **78% increase** (over the previous four year run rate) **in outside consults** for both the new and existing office site. The results of month thirteen show this consult referral rate to be climbing at an even higher rate! Twenty-two new PCP offices are now referring regularly and current and dormant referral sources are increasing their referrals at an unprecedented rate! The practice’s new satellite office is now running a profit and referrals are growing at both sites with high paying referrals for well insured patients.