



## Marketing Your Practice Series, Part 2: How to Introduce Yourself to a New Community

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***Prepared by the SVS Young Surgeons Advisory Committee***

*This is the second in a series of practice memos that are being developed to assist vascular surgeons to effectively market their practices.*

As a fellowship or integrated residency trained vascular surgeon, your skills in the surgical and nonsurgical treatment of arterial, venous, and lymphatic disorders provide a valuable resource to the community. Vascular surgeons are uniquely trained to offer comprehensive care for patients with vascular disease. Your training in the modern age of vascular surgery gives you unparalleled expertise in patient evaluation and screening, medical management, modification of risk factors, and vascular imaging. Your proficiency in the latest minimally invasive technologies, as well as open surgical techniques, allow you to tailor-fit a treatment plan for each individual patient. You offer both patients and referring physicians a balanced view of current treatment options and long-term follow-up to optimize outcomes. Referring physicians in your community need to understand that by sending a patient to you, the patient will receive the very best in vascular care, including evaluation, risk modification, endovascular treatment or open surgery, and follow-up. Before you begin your introduction to the community you need to first assess your unique situation.

## Assess Your Situation

- What are your unique strengths?
- What is your ideal practice?
- What does the community need?
- *The Marketplace*

Begin by assessing your market. What aspects of vascular surgery could be improved in your community? Where is there room to introduce new technology? Try to identify a unique niche only you can fill, and then sell it.

# Identify Your Unique Niche

## ***Dialysis Access***

Dialysis access is a bread-and-butter business line for a vascular surgeon. The majority of communities frequently have a need for expertise in this field. Begin by introducing yourself to the nephrologists in your area and putting in time at the dialysis clinic. After your first few dialysis cases, be sure to visit your patients in the unit. You also should plan to get face time with the nurses and technicians. Make a good first impression by offering to take emergency calls for the clinic's urgent access needs (clotted access). Presentations to the dialysis support group also are another good way to communicate your message. For example, discuss the idea of introducing routine surveillance ultrasounds for arteriovenous fistulae (AVF) and arteriovenous grafts (AVG). This topic could help attract additional business into your peripheral vascular lab, as well as generate cases for graft salvage. Additional patient education topics such as diabetic ulcers, smoking cessation, stroke prevention, and peripheral arterial disease also may be appropriate. Refer to Vascular.org's Patient Resources section for additional patient education topics and downloadable vascular health fliers.

## ***Wound Care/Limb Salvage***

Because you treat both arterial and venous disorders, you are an essential partner for any wound care clinic. This is an excellent source for patient referrals. Visit the wound care clinic in your community and meet with the nurses, therapists, and physicians. Offer to do a clinic day in their facility to evaluate lower extremity wounds. You also will want to meet with the local podiatrists and plastic surgeons that see lower extremity wounds. Be sure to educate them about your endovascular skills. Another opportunity is to partner with your local vein product representative to make a presentation at the wound care clinic on venous stasis ulcers. Introduce the idea of minimally invasive vein ablation techniques for treatment of stasis ulcers. Don't forget to take before and after pictures of your first limb salvage, vein ablation, and sclerotherapy cases to further help advertise your work.

## ***Non-invasive Vascular Laboratory***

The non-invasive vascular laboratory is essential to the function of a vascular surgeon and is another useful way to educate physicians, attract referrals, and expand your capabilities. If there is a hospital-based laboratory in your community, insist on being involved in the administration and interpretations. Interact personally with the vascular technologists so they know you are happy to act as a resource, as well as a referring choice. Download the Vascular Lab Practice Memo for more information on how to develop and operate a non-invasive vascular laboratory.

[How to Start a Vascular Lab ]

## ***Varicose Veins***

Partner with your local vein ablation representative to offer free vein screening days. You also could offer free screenings for peripheral arterial disease. These events will help bring new patients into your practice. As you plan screening events, you may want to reach out to product companies as several of them offer free educational handouts, videos, and posters, as well as manpower to staff these events. Download the SVS Screening Event Toolkit for more information on how to host a screening event, available patient forms and materials, and tips on how to market your event to the media.

# Market to Your Community

## ***Participate in Stipended Call***

Vascular surgeons see numerous urgent medical problems and therefore, many hospitals offer stipended vascular call schedules. Taking emergency room call will help increase your profile in the community. Further your influence by presenting an update on vascular emergencies to the emergency room physicians and staff at your hospital during their monthly division meeting. Describe new technology they may not be familiar with such as endovascular aneurysm repair, carotid stenting, and mechanical and tissue plasminogen activator (TPA) thrombolysis for deep vein thrombosis. Don't ever lose sight that the emergency room physicians and staff at your hospital are the gatekeepers for numerous

referrals of urgent vascular problems. A well-planned introduction solidifies your position as their number one vascular specialist for referrals.

### ***Grand Rounds/CME Lectures***

One of the most effective ways to reach community physicians is by lecturing at hospital grand rounds or local physician educational seminars offering continuing medical education credits. Present a lecture to discuss an area of your practice you would like to expand.

### ***Industry-sponsored Events for Physicians***

Industry will frequently be interested in helping you advertise and sponsor a dinner event. For example, a talk could be given to podiatrists on new technologies for the treatment of critical limb ischemia. Podiatrists can be a rich source of referrals and should be actively reached out to for future partnerships. You also can offer to host a lunch event in a referring doctor's office. This will give you one-on-one contact with the staff and physicians during the normal work day, as well as provide them with an opportunity to be better acquainted with you. Please note that at some institutions industry-sponsored events may be prohibited. As an alternative strategy, you could seek support from your hospital's public relations/marketing department to help increase your presence and visibility in the community. For example, you could ask your hospital to support free screenings on peripheral vascular disease, diabetes, or venous thromboembolism. Refer to the SVS Branding to Referring Physicians Toolkit for additional event planning resources. [Branding Your Practice to Referring Physicians ]

### ***In-services for Hospital Nurses and Technicians***

Volunteer to give an in-service lecture to hospital nurses and technicians. This will not only help to improve the level of care provided to your patients in the hospital, but also will help to unlock new referral sources. As nurses and technicians are frequently asked medical questions by friends and family, it is important for them to think of you when queried about the treatment of vascular problems.

### ***Community Outreach***

Community outreach is another successful form of advertising. Many elder care centers, gyms, churches/synagogues, or service organizations (Rotary club, etc.) host guest speakers. Be sure to bring handouts for attendees to take home as a reminder of your talk. It is important to remember that the attendees will likely share the information and/or handouts from your talk with their neighbors, friends, and family, as well as their physician during the next office visit. The outreach from these events can have a very wide range. Download the SVS Branding to the Public Toolkit for presentation materials and messaging strategies. [Branding Your Practice ]

### ***Local Advertisements***

Local newspapers and TV stations frequently have an "Ask the Expert" advice column. Reach out to them and offer to contribute to the column. Media also will typically develop human interest stories on topics such as providing a unique service to the community or bringing new technology to the local hospital. Listings in the business section of the yellow pages are helpful, but an online listing of your practice's Web site will likely reach a wider audience. Additionally, local magazines, newspapers, and radio stations offer several other forms of advertising. Most importantly, when conducting a promotional campaign, SVS members should always adhere to the SVS Code of Ethics Policy regarding advertising: "A SVS member shall not publicize or represent himself or herself in any untruthful, misleading, or deceptive manner to patients, colleagues, other health care professionals, or the public." Download the SVS Branding to the Media Toolkit for additional resources on how to work with the media, as well as sample press releases. [Branding Your Practice ]

## **Build Relationships with Referring Physicians**

Good communication skills are essential when working with other physicians. It is important to remember this as you market yourself to a new community. A few helpful tips<sup>1</sup> include making it as easy as possible for referring physicians to reach you. For example, when referring physicians call, be sure your office staff does not place them on hold but instead transfers them directly to you in a timely manner. You also will want to learn what level of communication your referring physicians expect from you, i.e., do they want summaries or more specific details? Another key element is to make

sure you always do your own follow-up calls. The referring physician wants to hear directly from you, not another member of your staff. Talking to them one-on-one also will help you build a better rapport with them and show them that you value their time.

Additionally, explore other ways to keep in touch with your referring physicians. Suggested ideas include posting resources for referring physicians on your web site, using social media, developing a referring physician newsletter, and creating a feedback survey for them to complete. Most importantly, don't forget that you also need to make yourself highly visible when you visit their places of work, as well as interact courteously with all members of their staff. This will not only help them keep you in mind for future referrals but also will help you further build a positive reputation among referring physicians and their staff members. For additional communication tactics, refer to Satiani A, Satiani B. Marketing strategies for vascular practitioners. *J Vasc Surg* 2009;50:691-7.

## Plan Your Marketing Budget

During the formative years of your practice, you can expect to spend about 5 to 10 percent of your gross practice income on advertising if you are in a competitive market area and 1 to 5 percent if you are in a less competitive area. It is very important to budget for marketing expenses. Building a foundation for a successful and sustainable practice takes not only dedication to patient care, but also some basic business acumen. If you are successful at both demonstrating and advertising that you are a leader in your hospital, a citizen of your community, and a professional in all aspects of your work, you will establish yourself as the community's primary resource for vascular excellence.

## Podcast Video: How to Introduce Yourself to a New Community

<sup>i</sup> Satiani A, Satiani B. Marketing strategies for vascular practitioners. *J Vasc Surg* 2009;50:691-7.

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