



SKIN CANCER
FACTS AND FICTION

**Build Your
Practice Through
Community
Education**



Easy tips to establish and develop community programs that will help build and shape your practice.

By Paul Winnington, Editor-in-Chief.

To heal and to educate may not be very different undertakings, as the title “doctor” derives from the Latin for “to teach or to lead.” Dermatologists today recognize that patient education is as important as ever before. Thanks to the Internet, pharmaceutical marketing campaigns, and a general increase in education, the lay public has access to tremendous amounts of information about skin diseases and their treatment. But that extensive access is both a boon and a bane. Patients still need guidance from trusted experts, and dermatologists who take the time to lead individuals through the available information will provide a valuable service to the public and perhaps lead patients to their own practices.

For many dermatologists, community involvement and public education are already significant components of their professional activities. Yet many don't realize the significant

benefits their involvement can have on community members, their practices, and even on the public perception of the specialty. Here's a look at the benefits of community involvement with tips for developing effective programs.

Know the Benefits

Richard G. Fried, MD, PhD of the Yardley Skin Enhancement and Wellness Center outside of Philadelphia, recalls a medical school mentor who urged dermatology residents to be “visible and valuable members of the community.” Certainly, dermatologists who participate in the community are being “responsible citizens,” Dr. Fried observes, but the contribution also helps create goodwill for the physician.

“You are able to reach a lot of people that you would not otherwise; whether it is due to their financial situation, health insurance plan, or busy schedules,” notes Han N. Lee, MD

Director of Dermatologic Surgery and Assistant Professor of Dermatology at USC Keck School of Medicine. “It allows them to have access to various physicians in a more relaxed environment and they have the opportunity to learn about matters that they may not have had time to ask their own physicians in their 10 minute appointment.”

In addition to potentially attracting patients and getting a sense of one’s own community, programs may also offer opportunities to meet and network with other referring physicians, adds Dr. Lee, a member of the American Society of Dermatologic Surgery public service committee.

Identify your Goals

Community education programs obviously raise awareness of skin disease and its treatment among the public. Studies and surveys consistently reveal that myths about the nature of common skin diseases persist. Furthermore, with the rate of pharmaceutical development lately, it’s difficult for many lay people to keep track of what’s available for various disease states. Add cosmetic products and procedure claims to the mix, and the need for education becomes more evident. The best outcome of a community education program is that a patient in need of medical care will be motivated to present to a physician for assessment and treatment. It’s an added bonus if they become *your* patients. Furthermore, educational programs have an inherent marketing benefit that increases the visibility of your name and your practice within the entire community.

It’s easy to think of community involvement as necessary for younger dermatologists, who “might have more time to be involved and they may be more motivated to get involved to attract more patients, especially if they are more cosmetically inclined,” Dr. Lee says. But she thinks physicians of every age benefit from staying involved. “I think that it’s definitely advantageous for older dermatologists to be involved in these programs so they can give back to a community and also keep abreast of what kind of information patients are seeking.”

Finally, community education can help you develop a niche for your practice or to build an element of your practice that may be underdeveloped. As Dr. Fried observes, community involvement “can help you to build the kind of practice you want to build.”

Suppose you wish to expand your practice focus to include more psoriasis treatment and expanded use of biologic therapies. Maybe you have an aging patient population and you want to draw younger patients in. Perhaps you want to increase interest in a newly purchased laser system. Identify the patients you want to reach and determine which programs would best reach them.

Identify Opportunities

The size, scope, and style of your community education programs can vary depending on the educational focus, your personal style, and the audience you are seeking or addressing. Think creatively. Anything from community screenings, in-school presentations, seminars in your office, an office “open-house,” or programs sponsored by community health organizations or hospitals may be appropriate. Identify and develop opportunities based either on your practice goals, a community need, or current opportunities.

Practice development. For the practice looking to entice younger patients, school-based acne presentations or programs on cutaneous health could be a good starting point. There’s so much misunderstanding about the causes of acne and the role of hygiene and diet that patients could surely benefit from straightforward, non-nonsense recommendations from an expert. Thanks to your insight, some youngsters may be willing to discuss their concerns about acne with a parent and seek treatment. If you become the teen’s dermatologist, you might also become the dermatologist for the teen’s family.

Given the potentially dire consequences of cumulative sun exposure, reaching teens and early adolescents with sun safety education is another good idea.

Psoriasis is another area where there’s either a lack of information or a great deal of misinformation. Presentations on psoriasis are a service to affected patients and their families. “Education remains one of the important aspects of the care of psoriasis patients,” says Abby Van Voorhees, MD, Director of the Psoriasis Treatment Center at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. “Despite the efforts thus far, many who suffer with this disease still believe that there is no hope for their condition. This is no longer true and on-going educational efforts are the only way to rectify this mistaken notion.”

Consider addressing members of a support group, speaking through a local hospital, or planning your own seminars.

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Four Easy Steps for Developing Community Education Programs

1. Devise Goals.

Do you want to simply draw patients? Are you targeting a particular patient group? Do you want to develop a specific area of your medical or cosmetic practice?

2. Identify Opportunities.

Where can you reach your target demographic? What are the educational needs of your community? Are there existing fairs, programs, and educational series that you can participate in.

3. Think Creatively.

Devise programs and services that meet your personal interests or your practice goals. Be creative. Beyond traditional lectures and seminars,

consider open-houses, lunch time seminars in your practice or at local companies, etc.

4. Seek Support.

If you need help getting your program off the ground, turn to local support or advocacy groups, pharmaceutical marketers, and free or low-cost community resources (community newsletters and newspapers in particular).



Psoriasis doesn't tend to be a priority subject for the school-age crowd, but you might get requests to speak to the schoolmates of a patient who has psoriasis in order to explain the disease to other children and assure them of its non-contagious nature.

If you've recently added a service to your practice, consider holding an open-house for patients and prospective patients. Be on hand to describe the new procedure or medication. If appropriate, have staff members stationed throughout the office to also offer information and even demonstrations. In the case of certain cosmetic procedures, you could have staff members volunteer to undergo a treatment as part of the informational session.

Community need. Alternatively, you could develop programs in response to your community's specific needs. A beach town may have need for good skin cancer and sun protection education. Diverse populations warrant programs on ethnic skin concerns and treatments.

Consider the anchors of your community: schools, major employers, large civic organizations, or churches. Reach out to these organizations and offer to provide seminars through

them. An employer might see the benefit of educating workers about options to manage chronic diseases such as psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, which are shown to affect productivity and work attendance. Individuals who spend a great deal of time face-to-face with clients might welcome a program on general skin care and the latest in treatment of dermatoses like acne and rosacea.

You could always invite patients or potential patients to lunchtime seminars held within your practice or perhaps offer to visit local companies during lunch time to offer seminars.

Dr. Lee suggests that you "start in smaller communities that interest you, for instance your local school or your children's school, church, alumni associations, hospitals, retirement communities, and gyms." Having recently become a mother, she observes that a "mommy & me" group could even present a good opportunity.

Opportunity-based. Look out for opportunities to get involved in existing programs. This could be the easiest way to get involved in community education and might provide the

Acne Education Takes Center Stage

The extent of acne miseducation is impressive, with myths about chocolate, poor hygiene, and more plaguing patients. Recent developments may thankfully help dispel acne myths and support dermatologists' education efforts.

For adults, Dr. Fried's book *Healing Adult Acne: Your Guide to Clear Skin and Self Confidence*, available September 1 (New Harbinger Publications), offers facts about the pathogenesis of acne and describes available treatments. There's a realistic discussion of the contributory role of stress with suggestions for stress reduction techniques and lifestyle modifications that may help adult acne patients get control of their disease and feel better about themselves. Pre-orders through Amazon.com are now available.

The direct to consumer trend is moving in a new direction, as marketers deliver educational messages that target teens. From Differin ads airing during the MTV Movie Awards to a new Benzacilin campaign kicking off, pharmaceutical companies are striving to educate teens about the fact that there are effective options to manage acne. The advertisements attempt to dispel the myth that patients are responsible for acne and encourage teens to discuss with parents/guardians the disease. According to Dermik, the company strives to help teens partner with parents and then teens/parents to partner with dermatologists in order to obtain the appropriate treatment for their condition. The emphasis is on early intervention in efforts to prevent disease progression and hasten clearance.



most visibility for your practice. Sometimes malls, community centers, and fitness clubs sponsor health fairs. A dermatologist could easily get involved by offering skin cancer screenings or general skin care/cutaneous health analyses. Sporting events and community runs/walks often feature similar fitness and health services for participants and attendees.

Hospitals sponsor public education seminars. Determine the offerings at your local hospital and let organizers know of your willingness to participate. Several pharmaceutical companies sponsor educational seminars at locations across the country on specific diseases and treatments. If you know that pharmaceutical marketers are sponsoring or organizing programs in your area and you're interested in participating, let your local rep know you want to help out.

Identify Support Sources

Naturally, community education will require a time investment, but additional "costs" can be kept to a minimum, depending on the type and breadth of programs you implement. Printing some brochures, flyers, and programs or even conducting a mass-mailing to existing patients isn't too costly. Look for low- and no-cost marketing opportunities, such as the events calendar in your community newspaper, the local hospital newsletter, community newsletters, etc.

Seek partnerships or co-sponsors, if appropriate. The local chapter of a national organization dedicated to disease education and research might help promote your program or offer grants. Determine if and how pharmaceutical companies can help. Start with your reps who may have advice or be able to offer resources. They may also be able to supply extra samples you can distribute to program attendees—perhaps a sunscreen sample, a facial cleanser, or a moisturizer—depending on the focus of your presentation.

Finally, don't forget that the AAD offers support to dermatologists establishing community education and screening programs. There's a handbook dedicated entirely to skin cancer screenings that comes complete with guidelines, forms to guide evaluation of individuals and for documenting findings, and sample brochures.

A Two-Way Street

Dermatologists who participate in the community extend the medical care they provide, serving a wide range of individuals and promoting healthy habits. At the same time, they reap benefits for their practices and the specialty. Whatever your approach, be sure that you enjoy what you're doing. "Try to reach out to people that you can relate to," Dr. Lee suggests, "then the community education can go both ways."