



KNOWING HOW TO KEEP PATIENTS COMING BACK

Wendy Lewis explains how many aesthetic practices focus heavily on attracting new patients, yet overlook the revenue and loyalty potential within their existing client base



WENDY LEWIS is Founder/President of Wendy Lewis & Co Ltd, Global Aesthetics Consultancy since 1997, author of 13 books, and frequent presenter on the international stage. Her first textbook, *Aesthetic Clinic Marketing in the Digital Age* (CRC Press) debuted a second edition in 2024.

email: wl@wendylewisco.com

MANY PRACTICES LEAVE MONEY ON THE TABLE BY FAILING TO educate their clients sufficiently as often as they can. This is an all-too-common missed opportunity that can hurt your bottom line. For example, just by scheduling next visits while the patient is still in the practice, you can give your clients the best experience and make a big difference in keeping patients coming back for their next treatment. Packaging a treatment series can elevate your bottom line substantially, while giving clients the best possible experience.

Build trust to enhance the experience

In a competitive category like medical aesthetics, focusing on building trust and expanding the client's experience are tried and true strategies for growing long-term patient relationships.

According to Bryan G. Forley, MD, FACS, an aesthetic plastic surgeon in New York City, 'Patient retention is a key element in building a healthy practice. The patient experience in the office is more important than marketing materials, repetitive emails and newsletters, or a slick website for maintaining loyalty. A caring, interactive, positive experience with all members of the office team, from the doctor to the front desk, and staff will be long remembered when it comes time to book a future appointment or treatment.'

'Aesthetic patients have a lot of choices in every market, and practices need to keep that in mind. There is nothing more certain to drive a patient out of a practice than a rude or demeaning interaction with someone at the front desk, regardless of the expertise and years of specialised training of the physician,' he adds.

Fostering strong client relations

Building trust and rapport with patients is critically important in aesthetics. They have a vast array of options where they can choose to spend their money on aesthetic treatments. It is very important to strive to keep your best clients in your practice, rather than the other businesses in your area.

'The current environment in most major sites is steep competition from big hospitals and chains,' says Judith Hellman, a dermatologist practising in New York City and South Florida. 'Patients may leave a doctor after a long relationship because their insurance changes, they may move to another city or find someone else who has cheaper fees.'

'It is very important to retain your existing patients first while trying to attract new ones. Make sure that you let them know they are very important to you, and try to keep them happy with their experience in your practice. We go above and beyond to address their needs and to show them that we care about them as individuals, not just as patients. This entails personalised correspondence, a warm and friendly reception, and remembering little things about their lives and families. These small gestures can make a big difference to retain the patients you already have,' she said.

Many practices miss an easy opportunity to strengthen relationships: proactive follow-up. A brief check-in call or personalised message 48-72 hours after a procedure reinforces care and professionalism. It also creates space to address concerns before they escalate. Automated systems can help, but personal touches remain far more impactful.

Educate instead of pitching

Consider how you feel when an aggressive salesperson follows you around Bloomindales asking, 'Do you need any help?' It can be a real turnoff unless you are looking for something specific. A common response may be, 'no thanks' or 'just browsing.'

However, you can engage with a client in a different way by making it educational. All aesthetic practices offer education as well as outcomes. You are also offering your expertise in terms of skin, hair, body, aesthetic treatments, and much more. This is where your expertise can really shine.

Create protocols for your most important treatments and products, one for staff and another for clients.

Implement a follow-up protocol that is more educational than selling. Consider creating a one-page patient journey for your most requested treatments and share it with your clients via email or text rather than paper that may get lost.

According to Josh DeBlasio, a 25-year aesthetic industry veteran, 'Patient retention is never a sexy subject. I often hear from practices, "All our patients come back." However, they may not have any idea where to start or to measure how they are doing.'

'In my experience, there is no metric that is more important to a practice than patient retention. That tells

“In my experience, there is no metric that is more important to a practice than patient retention. That tells you all you really need to know.”

Josh DeBlasio

you all you really need to know. At every conference, there are talks on "How to boost your Instagram followers," "Effective use of influencers," and "Add 5 new patients per week guaranteed."

These talks are always packed. However, when there is a panel on "How to measure and improve patient retention," people start looking at their phones or going to grab a coffee. Learning how to get your current patients to come back to your practice costs much less than spending money to bring in new ones. Many practices are neglecting their current patients in 95% of the practices I know!

Don't become a discounter!

If you consistently offer discounts, packages, and 'friends and family' perks, you are basically training your clients to wait for the next sale or discounts. It is akin to the concept of 'Pavlov's dog.'

I have seen some practices that have created a clever way to share a limited sale, one or two times per year, for VIP clients to stock up on some of the most popular products for friends and family.

Rather than relying on frequent discounts, practices can focus on value-based positioning. Highlight clinical expertise, safety protocols, technology investment, and personalised care. Patients who perceive high value are less price-sensitive. Occasional strategic promotions may work, but they should reward loyalty—not condition patients to wait for sales.

