

## Overcoming Preconceived Barriers to Hearing Health

A lot of time and resources are invested to bring prospective patients into the practice. When they do finally come in, many bring with them preconceived barriers to accepting care, including doubts about need, effectiveness and reliability, along with concerns about cost and the stigma of using a “visible sign of aging.” The good news is these preconceived barriers can be addressed even before patients are escorted back for the examination, making them more open to hearing health solutions.

### What Are Patients Thinking?

Many prospective patients have delayed seeing a professional about their hearing loss for a variety of reasons. These reasons are often aligned with their preconceived barriers to care and include:

- “I don’t need a hearing aid. They...  
...don’t work”
- ...cost too much”
- ...make you look old”
- ..are too unreliable”

According to Michele Ahlman, CEO, Clear Digital Media, “Patients have what they believe to be very valid reasons for delaying care. Once they make it into your practice, it is essential to immediately reinforce that they have made the right decision. That’s why we must be very intentional in our communications, starting with the practice reception area, which creates the first impression patients have of the clinic. And, believe me, first impressions matter. The reception area provides an ideal opportunity to educate patients, specifically addressing common key concerns, and inspire them to live life to the fullest.”

### Identify the Top 5 Preconceived Barriers

More than likely, you already know the top five barriers cited most often by prospective patients, either during the initial telephone call or during their first appointment. If you don’t, survey your next 25 patients to find out. As a team, put the top five on a piece of paper. Under each, list information and solutions that address the concern.

The reception area is much more than a place for patients to sit and wait. This valuable real estate can be used intentionally to share information and stories that can begin to dispel patients’ preconceived barriers to care. There are many ways to use your reception area to deliver information and solutions. Here are a few ideas:

#### ► The Environment:

The reception area should be clean, neat and well organized. It should also reflect the personality and brand of the practice. Nola Aronson, owner of Advanced Audiology, invests a lot of energy to make sure her reception area is warm and inviting. “We want our patients to feel as if they’ve walked into a friend’s home. Our furniture and décor feel like a living room and there are coffee and treats to enjoy. When patients are comfortable and relaxed, they are more open to engaging with our team, with our educational materials and with the idea of hearing health solutions.”

#### ► The Greeting:

As your team welcomes prospective patients to your clinic, they can ask a few questions to uncover barriers to care and then guide patients to relevant content.

“Mrs. Jones, you mentioned on the phone that you’ve noticed some degree of hearing loss for almost five years. May I ask why you didn’t seek hearing health solutions sooner?”

“Well, I heard from my friend Betty that her hearing aids just don’t work well and they are so expensive. I didn’t want to waste my money.”

“Thank you for sharing that information with me. I’m not sure what type of hearing aids your friend Betty has, but I’d like to share with you — before you see the doctor — some of the new technology that is available. And you mentioned cost. Please be assured we have payment solutions, including the CareCredit healthcare credit card available, so should hearing aids be recommended today, you won’t stress your budget.”

#### ► Custom Video Content:

Instead of using a reception area television to entertain patients, use it to educate and inspire. According to Michele Ahlman, “Video content is extremely powerful because it enables you to connect with prospective patients through multiple senses and storytelling. We highly recommend including patient testimonials as part of the content. People look for social proof to help them make decisions. A patient describing how no one notices her hearing aid can put others at ease who may believe they will feel self-conscious wearing a hearing device.”

#### ► Practice Displays:

Signs, posters and brochures can feature photos of younger, vibrant patients enjoying a more connected life with hearing devices. They can also raise awareness of special offers such as battery specials, risk free trials and promotional financing to address affordability, risk and ongoing patient support. ❖

Michele Ahlman is CEO of Clear Digital Media, a Chicago-based privately held company that prides itself in providing high-quality, educational content to healthcare providers’ waiting rooms. Michele is responsible for leading the development and execution of both long and short term strategies and strategic partnerships.

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