



Marketing a procedure:

A look at the effects of a hemorrhoid treatment advertising campaign on practice revenue

BY JEFF DEW

THE TREATMENT

Rubber Band Ligation is a relatively new procedure for most GI practices as anorectal care is not taught in most fellowship programs. In most cases, those patients who do not respond to conservative treatment are referred to surgeons, but things are changing. Gastroenterologists see and diagnose hemorrhoids on a routine basis – it's estimated that on average 15-20 percent of colonoscopies performed for rectal bleeding reveal symptomatic hemorrhoids as the cause of that bleeding.

Not only are hemorrhoid patients coming through physicians' doors on a daily basis, there is also a large portion of the population suffering from hemorrhoids and going without treatment, often because they don't know who to turn to. The National Institute of Health estimates that 50 percent of the population will have hemorrhoids by the age of 50, with the highest incidence of occurrence between the ages of 45-65.

ATTRACTING NEW PATIENTS

Patients are out there; they just need to realize there is a simple and effective treatment option for them. That's where advertising comes in. No, hemorrhoids are not life threatening, but they can cause enormous amounts of discomfort for patients for years on end if not treated – and they do get progressively worse with time. For our group, this was an opportunity to bring new patients into our practice and help them get back to living a pain-free life.

Gastrointestinal Associates in Knoxville, Tenn. (GIA), was looking for new ways to better care for existing patients and bring additional revenue into the practice. Our desire to expand and increase the time our physicians spend performing procedures that immediately impacted the lives of their patients also had the added benefit of building up the revenue base of the practice and ASC. Though we had been performing hemorrhoid banding for some time, we

wanted to expand this part of our practice and fully realize the procedure's potential.

THE CAMPAIGN & THE TECHNOLOGY

GIA initiated an advertising campaign over a three-month period, ending June 2012. The campaign consisted of a mix of both 30-second and 60-second television commercials, as well as placement of a print ad in a local newspaper, the *Knoxville News Sentential*. The commercials ran approximately 25 times per week over 12 weeks on local ABC, NBC, FOX and CBS affiliates. The newspaper ad ran seven times over the same 12-week period.

GIA utilizes the CRH O'Regan System[®] for hemorrhoid treatment. CRH Medical Corp., the company behind the O'Regan System, provides practices with marketing support and



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materials, and supplied us with the customized commercials and print ad used throughout the run.

THE OUTCOMES

As a direct result of the advertising program, GIA generated 74 new patients. More than 40 percent of the patients scheduled for an appointment required hemorrhoid banding treatment. Following the initial banding, these patients typically returned for two subsequent visits at two-week intervals as the treatment protocol for hemorrhoid banding with the O'Regan System indicates that only one hemorrhoidal column or cushion is banded per session, resulting in a much lower complication rate (<1%) compared to other banding techniques. It is also likely that these new patients, as well as some of their family members, will return to GIA in the coming years for other required gastrointestinal treatments.

Though many patients seeking hemorrhoid treatment were banded, it was noted that two-thirds of these hemorrhoid patients also required one or more

secondary procedures. Since the indications for hemorrhoid treatment include rectal bleeding, in some cases diagnostic procedures were performed to rule out other causes of their symptoms. These treatments consisted primarily of both lower and occasionally upper endoscopic procedures.

The total expense associated directly with the campaign was \$30,000, and included media production and placement costs. Based on the data recorded through the end of October 2012, GIA earned total net revenue of approximately \$90,000 over the course of the campaign. Our initial investment resulted in an impressive 200 percent return! These results are no doubt significant, not only because we were able to see such a considerable impact in our business, but also because we were able to provide care to so many in our community suffering from hemorrhoidal disease.

ADDITIONAL POSITIVE

The decision to initially incorporate hemorrhoid banding into our practice

several years back resulted in positive outcomes for our patients and the practice. In providing this procedure, even without advertising, we saw a lift in net revenue and patient satisfaction. For practices looking to expand their practice and provide better care for their patients, this type of procedure may be one way to get started.

The campaign obviously resulted in positive results for GIA. The return on investment we saw only made us more aware of the power of promoting a procedure. We are evaluating similar initiatives for other care procedures within our group. Though we had realized the benefits of hemorrhoid banding previously, the launch of the campaign demonstrated the significant potential that advertising has in treating this disease, affecting patients' day-to-day lives and the bottom line of our business.

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