



Build Better Patient Relationships, Faster, Using the FORD Method

By Karen Zupko

How long will I have to stop running after surgery?"

It's a simple question that many patients ask. You can choose to give the patient a simple answer, for example, six weeks, and move on to the next topic on your laundry list of risk factors and scheduling logistics. Or, you can choose to hear this question for what it really is: *an opportunity to deepen the relationship with the patient and get to know her as a person.* Because if you ask follow up questions such as "What kind of running do you do? How long have you been running? Have you ever run a race?" the patient will lighten up and share her story. Plus, even if she can't run, you can tell her what she can do.

Building personal relationships with patients makes them feel special and valued. And it's one of the surest ways to build a loyal, long-term patient base. Yet, as we observe the consultation process in aesthetic practices across the county, we find that it's the exception rather than the rule that staff—and surgeons too—have been trained to integrate rapport building into their patient interactions. In fact, I think many we've observed would fail at a networking event.

The good news is, there's an easy to use tool that can help: the FORD method. The FORD method is a framework that helps tease out personal information in four areas, and use it to enrich patient conversations.

FORD is an acronym for **F**amily, **O**ccupation, **R**ecreation, and **D**reams, and the method's concept is simple: the more you know about the patient in these four areas, and the better you are about using that information in patient communications, the faster and deeper you can take the relationship. And the deeper the relationship, the more valued your practice is to the patient, creating stronger connections, faster scheduling decisions, and increased loyalty.

How the FORD Method Works

FORD data comes at you all day long—during phone conversations, in the exam room and during fee quote discussions. Here are some examples of what patients may offer, without anyone even asking:



- You know, my dad passed away and left me some money with a sweet note. So, I feel like I can afford this change."(FAMILY)
- "I manage a team of younger professionals; I want to look as great on the outside as I feel on the inside."(OCCUPATION)
- "Over the last year, I've lost 30 pounds, and now I'm training for a half marathon. This is my reward!" (RECREATION)
- "The bank offered early retirement, so I am free of the grind. The way I figure it, this is a good time to make a change before I start traveling."(DREAMS)

Is your practice team paying close enough attention to pick up on this information and do something with it? Or, do they ignore it and forge full steam ahead into reviewing the quote line by line, and talking about scheduling options and fees?

One of our associates recently completed mystery shopping in three of a client's competitors. She threw out all kinds of clues about herself during the consultations. But not one patient care coordinator used the information to engage her in conversation. Not one! She provided clues about her recreational interests, her family, and her dreams. She even tried to sprinkle in humor. They never smiled at the joke. No one took the bait. So, it was no surprise to us that after several months, not one of these practices called or followed up with a note or letter. When you know nothing about a patient, other than she is a breast aug or a tummy tuck, making follow up calls can feel unproductive and even unpleasant.

Get Your FORD On

Savvy practices listen, ask for, and use FORD data from the first phone call to the last post-op visit. They use it to engage patients in conversation by phone and in the office, and also as conversation starters when they follow up with patients who have not booked. It makes getting to yes and follow up calls easier.

There are three ways to collect FORD data:

Listen to the patient. A truly revolutionary idea! When you hear a FORD data point being served, don't gloss over it. Lob it back and launch a conversation. If the patient says, "My daughter is finally getting married to a great guy," A response might be, "How exciting, Mary! How are the wedding plans going? When is the wedding?" The latter question also helps to schedule the surgery or other treatment in time for a full recovery.

Ask questions that don't require a "yes/no" answer. At the start of the fee quote discussion, if the patient coordinator asks: "Tell me what you thought about Dr. Wonderful's plan for your facial rejuvenation," that starts a conversation. Conversely, "Did everything go ok in your consultation with Dr. Wonderful?" does not. It elicits a one-word response, typically, "yes."

Sleuth a little. The registration form is a treasure trove of FORD data. Occupation is one of the best conversation starters. "You manage a vet clinic. What's it like to work with animals all day long?" or "I see you work in real estate. How is our local market moving these days?"

Many registration forms also have a line for interests and hobbies. If a patient takes the time to provide this information, be sure to ask about it. And pay attention to personal details. Interesting jewelry, a great handbag, or the latest mobile device can morph into an interesting conversation - if only you ask. For example, when the patient whips out her smart phone to look at her schedule, ask: "Karla, you are just like me! I would not know where I'm supposed to be without my electronic schedule. What other apps do you use to stay organized?"

A great way to bake the FORD method into your daily routine is to start each clinic with a

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morning huddle. The surgeon, patient coordinator, and clinical staff “Get their FORD on” by reviewing the appointment schedule and conferring about how and who on the team will kick start patient conversations. This plan-ahead strategy makes consultation process handoffs more effective and will personalize each patient’s experience. Journalists prepare for interviews—take a page from them and prepare to meet consult patients.

Train everyone in the practice (surgeon too) how to collect and use FORD data. This is especially important for staff that thinks that they don’t have time to strike up a conversation. As a team, assess the best ways to quickly and easily ask questions, pick up FORD clues, and enter them into computer system “Notes.” By developing this habit, it will become such an important part of your consultation process that no one thinks of it as “one more thing.” If your team could use some training in this area, contact us. We offer coaching that can help you make the transition.

Because practices that create the most memorable conversations and relationships will easily stand out, it’s worth the time and effort to use FORD. Look at it this way, if a potential patient is seeing three surgeons, I guarantee that the standout practice will be the one where they felt genuine interest in them as person, not just as a procedure. And, it will likely reduce some of the pressure on fees. We hope that practice is yours.

P.S. We use FORD here at KZA and know that it works on you, dear readers! Wink.

Karen Zupko, President of Karen Zupko & Associates, Inc., is an internationally sought-after speaker, author, and practice management consultant. For over 27 years, she and her team have been advising and educating aesthetic plastic surgeons on management and marketing issues, including fees, personnel, technology, and practice expansion. KZA provides coaching the FORD method. Ms. Zupko is a regular speaker at American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery annual meetings, and IMCAS Paris. Karen recently spoke at the Australian Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery in Tasmania. She delivers regional workshops for aesthetic practice staff.



Will Securing My Website Increase My Google Rankings?

By Keith C. Humes, CEO Rosemont Media, LLC

In the dynamic world of Internet marketing, new ways to improve your website’s search engine rankings are consistently being created by the powers that be. Most recently, Google announced sites opting to secure their web pages by switching from HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) to HTTPS (Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure) will now be provided a minor boost in the search engine giant’s overall ranking algorithm. How much of a boost? Now that’s the million-dollar question.

As of now, securing your website with HTTPS has not shown to provide a significant increase in your Google rankings. This can likely be attributed to how minute a role HTTPS currently plays in the grand scheme of Google’s algorithm—the search engine has acknowledged that factors such as “high-quality content” still have a greater influence on SEO. That being said, making the switch from HTTP to HTTPS may not be such a bad idea.

Benefits of HTTPS

As a proponent of improving the overall safety of the Web, Google has long been pushing for websites to improve their protection against security breaches. If you’ll recall from earlier, the HTTPS acronym stands for Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure, which is essentially a secured variation of the more commonly used HTTP you may see prefacing a website’s domain name in the address bar of your browser. Due to the added layer of security HTTPS provides via encryption, several websites have already made the switch, and many more are following suit in order to stay on par with ever-evolving “best practice” strategies.

By making the transition to HTTPS, you too can follow “best practices” and ensure valuable data on your website is protected by encryption, including email addresses, phone numbers, and other personal information submitted through your site. What’s more, Google has also revealed it may strengthen the influence HTTPS has within the overall search results algorithm as time passes, which may lead to improved results down the line should you have an HTTPS site.

Things to Consider

In order to secure your entire website, each internal page must be switched to HTTPS. Reason being, Google recognizes HTTPS on a URL basis as opposed to a site-wide basis. Additionally, any unsecure widgets or plugins on a particular page will compromise the security of the entire page. To avoid this, you must either secure each widget and/or plugin individually or remove them from the page entirely.

When all is said and done, employing “best practices” throughout all aspects of your Internet marketing strategy—which includes everything from your website design to regular content updates—is highly recommended. By doing so, you can help ensure your online visitors are receiving the highest quality experience possible, and the search engine rankings should follow.

If you are interested in securing your website by making the switch from HTTP to HTTPS, or if you have any questions about “best practices” for Internet marketing, contact Rosemont Media, LLC at info@rosemontmedia.com for more information.

