



REFERRAL RELATIONSHIPS

3 relationships to nurture to gain, and maintain, your ideal client base

The math is easy. The health of any home health agency depends on the number of referrals that are received.

So, the question becomes, how does a home health agency distinguish itself from the competition? How do you earn those coveted referrals?

Home health agencies should concentrate on their strengths. "If you have a new technology you use, that will give you a competitive edge," according to industry expert Thomas Franks, President of SafeGuardian CareCallers™. "If you are known for your service, promote that. Think of what sets you apart."

As you proceed, examine your relationships with:

- Referrers
- Technology
- Clients

1 What is your relationship with referrers?

The first step is to develop good, trusted relationships within the health care community. Creating and maintaining relationships takes time and patience.

As any home health business owner knows, physicians are often the first group professionals reach out to when contacting potential referrers. In person meetings provide the best chance to get to know doctors who could refer to your company, but securing those meetings is difficult. There are other barriers to success, including lack of marketing materials or time to attend meetings. To overcome these and other obstacles, consider:

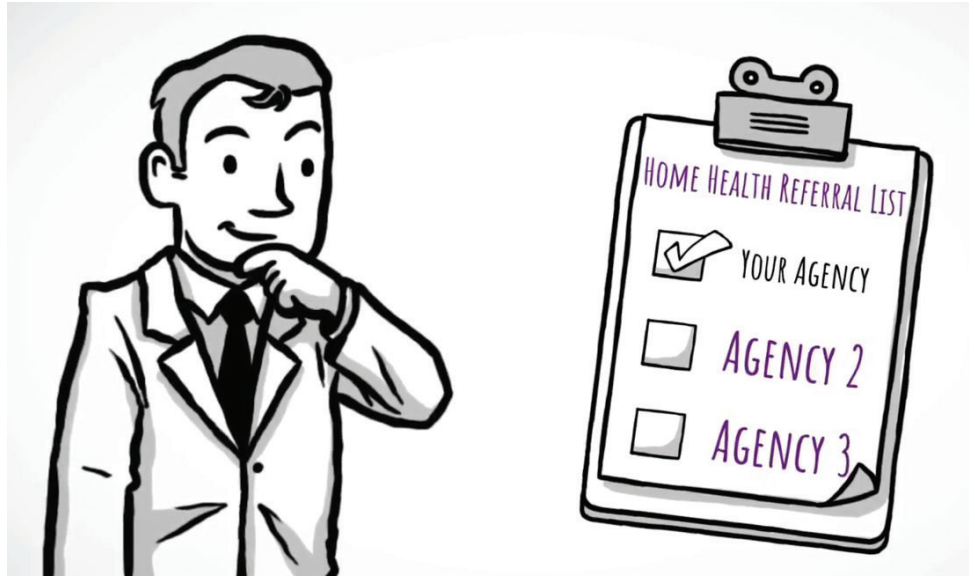
- **Developing relationships with the physician's staff.** This might get you in the door.
- **Preparing for every encounter.** Have your elevator speech ready. Practice in advance.
- **Creating professional leave-behind information.** You will need literature in the form of brochures, business cards and/or other patient-care guides.

When you formulate your pitch about your services and create your marketing materials, think about how your business can help the physicians to whom you are talking. "What can you do for them?"

If you have a new technology you use, that will give you a competitive edge. If you are known for your service, promote that. Think of what sets you apart.

- Thomas Franks
President, SafeGuardian
CareCallers™

Take a look
at your
relationships
with your critical
referring doctors,
social workers,
facilities and
community
groups.



Franks asks. “If you can make their life easier, you will get their attention.”

- **Show that your agency responds quickly**
- **Talk about how you can lower the number of patient readmissions**
- **Mention the things that set you apart in the marketplace—whether is it specially trained staff or technology (such as medication tracking devices or items like the CareCaller™)**
- **Stress your commitment to handling difficult cases**

Pharmaceutical representatives sometimes make presentations to discharge planners—or physicians, nurses, etc. Home care agencies can partner with those companies to participate alongside the pharma rep. This provides a chance to get to know the planners and to tout your services in a short presentation. You can share the costs of the event with the pharmaceutical company, making this a cost-efficient promotional opportunity.

Talking to people one-on-one about your company is always best, but talking

to a group of influencers can be just as impactful.

Speaking engagements are proven relationship-builders. Think about who your clients are and where your customer base is located.

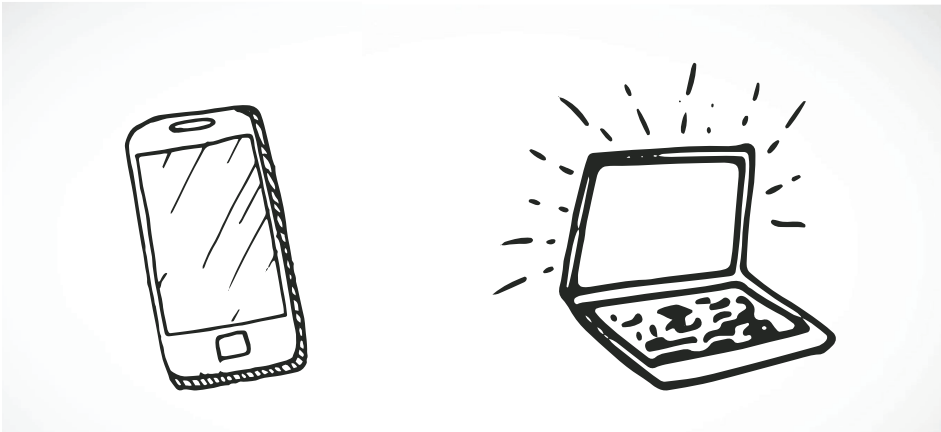
And be active in your community!

* Volunteer with local senior centers or nearby churches to solicit speaking invitations.

* When you have a chance to talk, do not focus only on your business. This is a chance to present yourself as a community leader in your industry. Select a topic helpful to your listeners—home safety following surgery, for example—so your audience will get to know you and see your range of knowledge.

* Join the area Agency on Aging and the Chamber of Commerce, speak to civic groups or at library lunch-and-learns. Every opportunity to get to know someone is an opportunity to earn more referrals for your business.

If you do not already know the people in your community, you are at a disadvantage. Get out there! The time you spend cultivating these



relationships can change the direction of your business.

2 What is your relationship with technology?

As the world has moved into the digital age, so has the home care market. Some agencies understand better than others the crucial role technology plays in growing and serving their client base. Health care professionals prefer to refer to companies that achieve the best patient outcomes, and technology continues to contribute to those kinds of success.

Data has always played a crucial role in health care, including the care that has taken place in the home. Temperatures are recorded, along with other vital signs. Lab work and other test information is available. Care plans are outlined. Those providing care or administering medications make a note of their actions and observations.

With the use of mobile phones or tablet devices to record patient information, home care agencies bring themselves into the 21st century.

“Today, caregivers can stand at a bedside and instantly add information to a patient’s file—information that is then available to the entire care team,” Franks explained. Rather than relying on a bed-side chart, notes

are submitted to a digital system that allows caregivers to determine trends and predict outcomes—in real time.

Other advancements are available that can help your business perform at its best. Personal Emergency Response Systems (PERS) are a proven technology that can secure attention for patients and quickly address issues before a readmission is necessary.

In fact, studies find that monitored PERS reduce mortality rates by up to 75 percent and reduce rehospitalization by up to 59 percent. By providing patients with this unit, agencies secure better

peace of mind for both physicians and families.

While typical PERS units offer alerts that increase reaction time, there are some next-generation technologies on the market that can accelerate and customize PERS alerts. The [CareCaller™](#), for instance, includes an added feature: the ability to text or call family members as well as home health agencies. “Two-way voice communication from the wearable pendant is an added bonus for who are evaluating the reason for the call,” Franks said. “The devices include a built-in fall detector as well as built-in GPS locator. Devices like these provide better outcomes for patients and fewer readmissions.”

Beyond equipping your team with the best technology, you can also use the digital landscape to promote your business. An easy-to-navigate website that is clearly designed and attractive is no longer a nice addition to your business, it is a requirement. To test the website’s usability, ask friends and family to visit and make suggestions. Chances are errors or glitches will be found that you were not



The key to the ongoing success of any home care agency is hiring the right staff members.

aware of before enlisting their help. There are several ways to increase the performance of your website.

- **Update content frequently.**
- **Tag words for Search Engine Optimization (SEO).**
- **Provide up to date contact information.**

Social media is another tool agencies can use to garner referrals. A presence on Facebook and LinkedIn can be particularly helpful to home care businesses. And, of course, joining referral and service matching networks are a good idea. If you are thorough at promoting yourself online, then someone searches in your area, your name will be at the top of the list.

3 What is your relationship with your clients?

All the referrals in the world along with the best website and technology will not carry your business long-term. Your company must provide exemplary care to your clients. Efficient, caring staff are vital to the ongoing success of any agency. As the population ages and the health care industry becomes more uncertain, there are more home patients to care for, and, more opportunities for home care services.

As the market continues to grow, so will the competition. The key to the ongoing success of any home care agency is hiring the right staff members. Patient retention and word-of-mouth endorsements are sometimes overlooked pillars of patient referral. A staff that makes a good impression,

performs in a professional manner, and maintains relationships with family and other caregivers is a staff that will secure future clients.

Here are some industry specific suggestions about how to enhance client relationships and forge long-lasting relationships:

- **Provide excellent care.** This should be obvious, as that is what you have been hired to do. Following the care plan is the very minimum of what is expected. Exceeding expectations with empathetic staff that goes the extra mile will earn your company a valued reputation.
- **Encourage ongoing training.** Engaged employees are better employees. Those who are learning on-the-job and receiving continuing education will not only be excited about their work, they will provide better care.
- **Be organized.** This is where technology can assist your team. Human resources software can keep assignments straight and on schedule. It can also track your team's efficiency. But remember, just because a home visit is fast does not automatically mean that it is efficient. Taking care of the details of each assignment and accurately recording them is essential.
- **Operate with integrity.** Your clients are in your community, and your reputation will proceed your business. Be honest with referrers,

clients and staff. Pay your bills and payroll on time. Become active in your community so people get to know you and you get to know them. When a mistake is made—and there will be—correct it as quickly as possible, find the root cause and apologize to those affected.

- **Respond quickly.** Answer questions and clear up issues when they arise. If you have set a deadline for reports, make the deadline. Be available to help family members interpret medical and care information. Yes, you are operating a business, but it is a business about people.

Conclusion

There is much at stake in the competitive home care industry. Business owners can better their chances for success by evaluating their company's strengths and then building a marketing plan to promote them. But first, they should take a look at their relationships.

Building and maintaining meaningful relationships among care and technology providers, community leaders and clients is the most important thing you can do for your business.

Homestead Health
Home Health CareCallers™
& NurseCallers™
800-209-3220
www.homesteadhealth.com
service@safeguardian.com