

Tips for Reaching Out to Small and Rural Communities

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Small and rural markets have unique conditions and situations to be aware of. To be successful, you need a process for planning, and not just reacting to what's happening in the community. Here are some tips to consider as you prepare to branch out—or grow your existing business—in these communities. And even if you haven't expanded your services to a small or rural community at this point, you may find strategies that fit your organization today.

Keep Conversations Confidential

- ❑ Have a zero-tolerance policy for chatting about clients and patients. Everyone knows everyone in small communities; it doesn't take long for a small comment to turn into a big issue.

Scout the community for recruiting opportunities

- ❑ Think creatively about staffing. Finding a person with small-town connections, who's passionate about the people in the community and is willing to work with employers may outweigh the importance of board certification or being the best of the best.
- ❑ Does your state law permit extenders? This is an opportunity to enlist PAs and nurse practitioners to grow your program.
- ❑ Grow a staffing program from within the community. Partner with local high schools and community colleges to encourage interest in allied health areas.

Provide up-to-date information and experts

You're perceived as the experts for people in these communities. Demonstrate that you're staying on issues that affect them most. Access occupational health databases and relevant technology.

Consider using generalists in these communities. They're especially attuned to seeing the big picture and the continuum of care—while still realizing the importance of accessing experts when needed.

Spend Wisely

Identify where you're making/losing money and make a plan to adjust when appropriate. Do you keep offering a certain service because it's a necessary component in your service line? Or is it simply the right thing to do because you're in a small/rural community?

Educate your staff so they know how to manage programs efficiently in this market.

Examine your mission and align your spending to fall in line with it. A loss leader like health screenings won't make money, but it can provide impressive numbers and may identify high-risk patients early enough for effective treatment.

Serve as a consultant

- ❑ To many employers, you'll be a main point of contact for their organization. You can help them by being more than a health care resource. Use your connections to put them in touch with insurance brokers and other professionals to help them move their plan forward and save money.

- ❑ Be attentive to what's happening not only in the workplace, but also with employees and their families. What can you do to help them individually?
- ❑ Use occupational health or workers' comp to open the door to gatekeeper's regulated needs in the workforce. Perhaps you can offer healthcare onsite for 24/7 workers (group and work health), as well as family health services. At a minimum, strive to provide key health screenings, health education and disease/care management.

Read more about how to create a successful strategy in these markets. For a copy of CHG's article on marketing to small and rural communities, from the Summer 2003 issue of the OHR Tracker, <http://www.systoc.com/Tracker/Summer03/Sales.asp>



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