

LET YOUR PATIENTS DO THE TALKING... • BY TONI BRISTOL

When someone is considering vision therapy it can be helpful for them to read testimonials or success stories from patients who had similar problems. Gathering success stories can sometimes be difficult. Patients will periodically send thank you letters, but how do you get success stories on a regular basis? And, is there a specific formula that should be followed when the stories are written?

The most powerful formula for a success story is one which includes: 1) A good overview of what life was like before VT; 2) It tells a little about other professionals who were seen and other solutions that were tried - to no avail; 3) If the patient was 20/20, and the problem was missed by vision screenings or other eye exams; and 4) What life is like now, after finishing VT.

Having a "success form" can be helpful. It is a good idea to put an introductory paragraph at the top of the form which says something like:

We are delighted to have helped resolve your vision problem. In order to help others who are trying to decide how soon to start vision therapy, we would appreciate it if you could

write a few words of encouragement. (For example, if you could describe what life was like before therapy and how it is now - what you feel has been gained by doing therapy.)

Because the changes are often very gradual and parents may forget what life was like before VT, it is helpful to give the parent or patient (if an adult) a copy of the symptoms checklist they filled in for the first evaluation along with a new symptom checklist to fill out at the time of the final progress evaluation. This helps to jog the parent's memory about what life was like before. At the same time, the parent should also be given a success form to fill out in the office just prior to seeing the doctor for the final progress evaluation.

Make sure your success form also has a section at the bottom for the patient to sign authorizing you to share what they wrote with others. In addition, please check your state board regulations to be sure that it is OK to use patient testimonials for marketing. For example, the State Board of Optometry for Illinois forbids the use of success stories in

marketing optometric practices, which unfortunately includes your website.

Once you have gathered together a number of testimonials, it is helpful to display them in areas where patients can read them. If you have enough you can make a "Patient Testimonial" book for your reception area. If you just have a few, you can post the best on a bulletin board. You can also create a "Wall of Fame," and post the success stories along with pictures of your happy patients for all to see.

I recently spoke with an ophthalmologist who was very impressed with the results of vision therapy. When I asked him what made him a believer, he said, "speaking directly with the teenagers and parents."

When your patients can share their results with others it can make a world of difference.

Wishing you a wonderful holiday season and all the best in 2010!

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Special Thanks to:

Insta-Tapes Digital Media – for recording the educational sessions