

Mistakes to Avoid When Dispensing in Your Practice

From overstocking to underestimating what patients will spend, here are some pitfalls of dispensing product in your practice.

By Joel Schlessinger, MD

Dispensing beauty and skin care products within your practice is both challenging and rewarding. In the May 2011 issue of *Practical Dermatology*, several clinicians shared their own personal insights on the products they dispense and why they have selected those products. To kick off this new monthly department, Aesthetics Management, in which I will provide perspective on all matters of dermatology practice where beauty meets business, I will continue this roundtable discussion of in-office dispensing with leading experts in the field. This segment will focus on tips to promote and improve sales of cosmetics and cosmeceuticals in your practice.

What was the one thing you did wrong when initially dispensing products that a newbie should know?

Doris Day, MD (New York, NY): In looking at my shelves, it's what I still do now—carry too many products. It dilutes what I carry and is hard to keep track of inventory. I will fix this when I move to my new space in a few weeks!

George Martin, MD (Maui, HI): Overbuying and getting stuck with "dead" inventory tied up too much money and did not give us the ability to stock up on hot selling items. Now we select the best therapies from multiple lines to address patient needs: photoaging; dyspigmentation; and redness; with multiple choices within any different therapeutic category.

Hema Sundarum, MD (Fairfax County, VA): I did not open the discussion regarding dispensed skincare with all my patients. Now, I realize that

appropriate skincare is potentially helpful to all my patients and that they are very appreciative of my recommendations in that regard. Another mistake was to underestimate the results that can be achieved with products that have sound science behind them, and the synergy between them and in-office cosmetic procedures.

Joel Schlessinger, MD (Omaha, NE): I resisted taking on more than one line for about six years, thinking that it would be sending mixed messages to my patients. With the advent of so many new lines, I have added more lines and now pick and choose depending on the patient.

Vivian Bucay, MD (San Antonio, TX): I agree with you, Dr. Schlessinger. Also, I underestimated what patients will spend on skin care. I also underestimated how much patients rely on us to guide them in their skin care needs.

Michael Gold, MD (Nashville, TN): I agree with Dr. Schlessinger. I initially used only one or two lines. Now we sell many. We also had quite a bit of inventory way back when. Now we limit our inventory to manageable amounts and order those products from those lines which fit our patient base and their needs.

Phil Werschler, MD (Seattle, WA): I failed to establish and implement an effective inventory control and tracking system for TLS/loss prevention.

Jeannette Graf, MD (NYC, NY): I agree with both Dr. Schlessinger and Dr. Gold: starting with one line. It is also important to remember that many of us were among the first dermatologists to dispense products before it was a common practice. Today there are

many options for new doctors, many choices, and it is highly acceptable for a dermatologist to dispense products.

Heidi Waldorf MD (NYC, NY): I walked into a primarily medical dermatology practice which already dispensed many basic products. I added cosmeceuticals over time as the technologies have improved. The only thing I would do differently would be to train the staff about the products sooner. Our nurses cannot dispense products without a doctor in our office, but they are great at figuring out what a patient might want. They learned by working with me, but an in-service for each new product would have been helpful. I have also involved them more in picking products earlier. Different patients have different needs and a group of nurses is a great focus group!

Tips For Dispensing Success

The above discussion shows different and varying points of view and practices regarding the introduction of products to your practice. There is no greater challenge in the process than starting, and it is natural to have doubts and missteps in the initial phases. This is one reason it is helpful to see where others have gone “wrong,” which may be an overstatement.

In light of these observations, I have put together a brief list of tips that I recommend for beginners. Additionally, I encourage readers to come to the course I run in Las Vegas, Cosmetic Surgery Forum (www.CosmeticSurgeryForum.com, December 1-4, 2011). During this course, we will be discussing the cosmeceutical field in depth, and many of the experts in this article will be in attendance as well.

1.) Find a product you believe in and only sell it if you or a close/trusted advisor feels it is something they would use on their skin.

2.) Talk at length to the company before purchasing the products. This is a decision that shouldn't be made lightly. Take time to investigate and make sure you get the best deal possible.

3.) Never assume you will sell the product. Start small and carry enough inventory, but not too

much. Typically, a set of six products of each item is a good start.

4.) Don't be bullied into taking on large amounts of a product just to be able to carry it. Most companies will work with you (within reason) to gain your business.

5.) Look at the terms of the contract before you sign it. Some contracts to sell products can be very one sided. Some even ask you for names of your clients/customers! If necessary, have your attorney review the contract.

6.) If you have nurses who are involved in the process, ask for trade sizes for them. This will enable them to be better points of contact for you and will gain them a familiarity with the products.

7.) Start slowly and grow modestly. Too many products at one time can be a challenge both in learning the products and in representing them to your patients.

8.) Always think of disease states that a product can help, such as acne, keratosis pilaris, folliculitis, etc. If these can be improved with the product, you and your staff (and the patients) will see benefits of the product and sell it easily.

9.) Keep track of your product. Inventory systems are critical and methods for making sure that returned products are disposed of or sent back to the manufacturer are just as important!

Successful Aesthetics Management

Over the next several articles in this roundtable discussion I will continue to expand upon the concepts and practice of dispensing cosmeceuticals, as well as various other topics concerning the practice of cosmetic dermatology. ■



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