

THE ART OF Fund Raising

Their skills as communicators and educators help make physicians excellent fund-raisers, but a few tips can make the process easier and more effective.

Most physicians with established careers don't expect to have to ask for money. Yet they are often the first to observe special concerns in their communities, such as the lack of health-care services in a homeless shelter or the need to establish a mobile clinic to reach an underserved population. Turning those observations into actions usually takes money.

Philanthropy is all about giving and caring, so it's not surprising that physicians should become involved in raising funds to help nonprofit organizations, particularly those that support health-related programs. Whether working with a team of development professionals in a university setting, serving on a board, or simply lending a hand to help a worthy community effort, physicians can play a variety of roles in the fund-raising arena, from informing prospective donors about a program and hosting events to developing fund-raising plans and requesting support.

As effective communicators and educators, physicians often make excellent fund-raisers, even without special training. However, before seeking support for a nonprofit endeavor, it helps to have a team, a plan, a little knowledge of the fund-raising process, and a few good relationships. As physicians' relationships often involve patients, taking extra care with such gifts of gratitude can help avoid privacy and ethical concerns.

It's who you know

Ask almost anyone with extensive experience in fund raising to describe its essence and you'll likely hear, "It's all about relationships." Philanthropy is a deeply human enterprise and connections are critical at every step of the way.

One physician who discovered the importance of relationships in leveraging funds is Steve Pounders, MD, a Dallas internist and the medical director of the nonprofit Nelson-Tebedo Clinic, which serves as an HIV/AIDS research and resource center. Volunteer physicians and charitable donations keep the clinic operating five days a week, providing anyone in the community with an at-cost means of receiving laboratory tests and seeing a

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PHOTO / © 2003 REID HORN

Steve Ponders, MD is a Dallas internist and the medical director of the nonprofit Nelson-Tebedo Clinic, an HIV/AIDS research and resource center. He says corporations benefit from funding appropriate causes. They "use it as a way to do advertising for their companies, as well as put their name out there for their patients to see. I think they hear that other companies are doing it, and they don't want to be left out."

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physician without relying on insurance.

Hoping to entice pharmaceutical companies to support the clinic, Pounders says, "I wrote a letter to give to the pharmaceutical reps or any company that was potentially interested in sponsoring." In the letter, Pounders outlined the important work and services of the clinic. Then he asked about 10 other community physicians who are HIV/AIDS care providers to join him in signing it. When the representatives received the appeal from the physicians they served, the response was strong and very positive.

Pounders feels that most companies "want to have a good image and they always have some funding for public relations and education and for supporting not-for-profits." The companies help fund laboratory work at the clinic and sponsor special educational fairs, as well as the organization's annual benefit, "Toast for Life." In giving to the cause, donors receive benefits in return. Corporate sponsors, in particular, says Pounders, "use it as a way to do advertising for their companies, as

well as put their name out there for their patients to see. I think they hear that other companies are doing it, and they don't want to be left out. I think that helps to keep them giving every year."

Creating a team

A fund-raising team is very important, particularly for busy physicians, says Peggy Calhoun, a senior principal of Florida-based Miller, Calhoun, and Company, who has served as a professional fund-raiser for about 23 years. Fund raising is not accomplished in a vacuum, she says.

A full development team, such as those often found in large organizations and universities, might include staff to manage special events, proposal writing, prospect research, and stewardship, in addition to fund-raising

To make a funding decision, a prospective donor must first understand the program, which means the fund-raising team must educate and articulate a strong case for support.

ing professionals who often specialize in annual, planned, corporate, and foundation gifts. However, smaller organizations often rely on the efforts of volunteers and staff that can function in multiple roles.

Even in a small community effort, Calhoun says, "the physician should never be placed in a position to solicit all prospects. Different members of the team will bring in different resources, different contacts,

different prospects—they will bring in different gifts." Before forming the team, she advises establishing a vision, goals and objectives for the program, defining the specific amount of funds needed, and outlining a development plan. Recruiting the right team is an art in itself. You need people who are passionate, but you also need good educators, communicators, and motivators, Calhoun says.

Once it has a vision, goals, and a plan defined, the team should target its best prospects. "One of the secrets of success," says Calhoun, "is you always put your efforts where the dollars lie." The best prospects are those who are close to your cause, then those who are affluent and close to the cause but have no giving habits. "Enthusiastic giving becomes infectious," she says. "It's very similar to a stone being thrown into a pond and creating a small ripple or a giant wake, depending on how big that boulder is."

An international effort

The team approach was vital to addressing the need for training mental health professionals in Eastern Europe after the Communist block fell, says Harvey Rich, MD, a private practitioner of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy in Washington, DC and the author of *In the Moment, Celebrating the Everyday* (William Morrow, 2002). The entire mental health system was in shambles—half of it was used for punitive purposes and the other half was primitive, says Rich, who currently serves as the chair of the committee in resource development for the



International Psychoanalytic Association. During the post-communist period, many practitioners from the region wanted to learn how to provide more effective therapy, but they lacked the resources to travel and obtain supervised training.

About eight years ago, several physicians from Europe and a few from the United States formed an international committee to develop a strategy to train these professionals from different countries even without a single setting in which to provide it. The committee created an organization without walls—the Eastern European Psychoanalytic Institute.

To raise funds to kick off the program, the physicians created a packet

Harvey Rich, MD helped generate funds for a new organization hoping to increase training for mental health professionals in Eastern Europe.

“We had to have everything done in four languages. We basically solicited analysts from all over the world.”

of information that included letters from significant people within the organizing committee and from highly esteemed individuals in different countries. Says Rich, “We had to have everything done in four languages. We basically solicited analysts from all over the world.” The appeal to about 10,000 analysts and a few family foundations produced about

\$50,000—enough to support training for the first cohort of 25 to 30 professionals from Eastern Europe. The institute is now supporting about 80 individuals who travel to train with volunteers and mentors, then return to their home countries better prepared to provide mental health treatment for populations that are desper-

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ate for services, says Rich.

Stating your case

To make a funding decision, a prospective donor must first understand the program, which means the fund-raising team must educate and articulate a strong case for support. This might require written materials, graphs, and media presentations. Even with effective education and communication, sufficiently cultivating a prospective donor's interest in a project and, ultimately, motivating that prospect to extend support can take time. "We're all motivated differently," says Calhoun.

Nona Snyder, an independent, Connecticut-based fund-raising professional and formerly the executive director of the American Cancer Society, agrees that education is the first step. "I always start cultivating through education. I send a package of material to the possible donor along with a request for a short meeting to bring them up to date on current research and/or programs," Snyder says. She suggests assembling an educational kit to convey key points, including curriculum vitae of the physicians involved in the project. When putting words to paper, be succinct, says Snyder, but include the 'who, what, where, when, and why.' Consider including quotes from patients on how a program has helped, and detail the benefits a donor will receive in return, says Snyder. For instance, in return for corporate support, the physician might provide seminars or a health awareness day. "Fund raising is really a business," Snyder says. You're competing for the same dollars as other organizations and groups.

Corporations and foundations

are common targets for nonprofit appeals for support. However, often these sources have very specific interests, as well as guidelines and deadlines for submitting proposals. "Many corporations have grant applications," Snyder says. "You'll find them on their Web sites. In many cases all you have to do is fill out the application."

Even in the corporate and foundation arenas, relationships can make a difference. "It's commonly understood that 80 percent of all donated dollars come from individuals and 20 percent comes from corporations and private foundations, but it's individuals who make those decisions," says April Box, the president and CEO of the Dallas Methodist Hospital Foundation. During her 20 years of professional fund raising, Box has found that a relationship with a decision-maker combined with a good project usually gives an individual an edge.

Though a fund-raising professional might initiate and nurture a relationship, physicians often are the best presenters of facts and information on health-related programs. Physicians are absolutely critical to the success of fund raising in any health-care organization, says Box.

A personal touch

In crafting the words to motivate others to extend support, a personal touch can sometimes make all the difference. When Abraham Lieberman, MD, a professor of neurology at the University of Miami and the medical director of the National Parkinson Foundation, invited Muhammad Ali, who has Parkinson's Disease, to help raise money for research, Ali asked

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them about the campaign. Patients would give money because they thought it was a good thing to do because it was going to support a major institution. It's possible that physicians who gain support for a university or organization might benefit indirectly in the sense of being viewed more favorably by peers and administrators. However, it cannot be a direct quid pro quo, says Lieberman. "It must be always clear that the money will not directly benefit you."

Lieberman makes an effort to establish a rapport with all of his patients—rich or poor. He says, "You basically have to be yourself, render a good service, and make it clear that the university or the foundation that you're associated with does many good deeds."

Special considerations

Receiving gifts from grateful patients within the mental health arena presents special concerns for physicians, says Rich, who helped write the ethical guidelines for fund raising for the American Psychoanalytic Association. "When is a patient ever free of influence of the power of the therapist? In my field, you cannot ask a patient for money, even if the patient comes to you and says, 'I'm terribly grateful and I want to give you this money.'" A physician should never accept such a gift, Rich says. Rather, the physician should direct a patient to proper channels—established nonprofit organizations that enable donors' gifts to be tax-deductible.

Patient privacy is another important consideration. In the mental health profession, says Rich, "our guidelines, ethically, are that we just never reveal the names of our patients to anybody." But privacy issues extend beyond the mental health arena, says Rich.

"Perhaps a colleague of mine has a wealthy patient who would love to support the kind of research I'm undertaking. My colleague should not give me that patient's name. I surely should not call that patient even if I had the patient's name because the privacy of that patient shouldn't have been breached," says Rich. "The best strategy for getting such funding is simply to begin publicizing your efforts. You write articles, you get on television and radio, and you hope that this person hears about it," he says.

"Physicians are a peculiar breed when it comes to fund raising," says Rich, "some are really good at it, and some believe it's not appropriate to the profession."

Building skills

While Rich encourages physicians to participate in fund-raising activities, "I think that they need to be involved intelligently and ethically rather than be involved in any way that makes them frightened," he says. "Fund raising is a skill. You learn how to do it. You try it once or twice and practice it. It starts to become fun."

To learn fund-raising basics, Rich, who was the founder and the first president of the Washington Psychoanalytic Foundation, attended courses on nonprofit laws, building boards of directors, and establishing legal, nonprofit entities under IRS guidelines. Now, he helps analysts around the country establish similar organizations. "We call them foundations," says Rich, and though the organizations raise money, they give almost 100 percent of it away to support programs. In helping the foundations get up and running, Rich teaches the fundamentals of

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fund raising, including tax laws and various types of gifts, as well as establishing a board of directors, preparing letters, and conducting telephone campaigns.

Rich strongly encourages physicians who are interested but inexpe-

rienced in fund raising to pursue training and talk with other physicians who have been successful. "It doesn't take a lot to learn the ABCs of this," he says. "What really has to be learned is the courage to do it, to pick up the phone and do it."

Being a good steward

Whether friend, corporation, foundation, celebrity, or patient, once an individual or an organization makes a contribution, it's important to express appreciation in a timely manner and keep donors informed of progress. Donors need to be assured that their gifts are being used for the purposes intended, which is among the Donors Bill of Rights. (See "For More Information," page 36.) Snyder advises, "Keep them in the loop. Let them know when their dollars have resulted in new research. Call them every few months to say hello. Invite them to appropriate medical conferences. Let them know their dollars are making a difference in the community."

When donors stay informed and involved, they often become long-term contributors who are grateful to have the opportunity to support a worthy organization that makes wise use of charitable gifts to meet a need. Physicians can play vital roles in the honored tradition of philanthropy, particularly when health-related programs are involved. With a little knowledge and the help of a solid team with a goal and a plan, physicians can make all the difference in building support for nonprofit health programs or organizations, whether local or global in scale. Such support could translate into the next breakthrough in medical research, new health services for the underserved, improved health care and education in the community, or the alleviation of human suffering in a remote corner of the world. ■

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