Dental Tribune catches up with Dr. Mario Vilardi, publisher of Dear Doctor – Dentistry & Oral Health magazine. The magazine is for general dentists and specialists interested in practice marketing within a cost-effective business model that uses patient education as the conduit. The beginning of each magazine starts with the dentist’s professional profile and is followed with informative articles by leading clinicians and academicians in order to educate patients about the resources available for their dental needs.

How long have you been practicing dentistry and what are your areas of expertise?

I graduated from dental school in 1974 and went on to specialize in periodontics in 1977. I was extremely fortunate to have studied at the University of Pennsylvania with mentors who are legendary preceptors in the field, Drs. Morton Amsterdam and D. Walter Cohen. They instilled not only a desire to attain clinical excellence, but a legacy of “giving back.” Through the teachings of Drs. Amsterdam, Leonard Abrams, Arnold Weisgold, Ed Rosenberg and Jay Seibert, I feel totally confident doing any periodontal plastic surgical procedure or implant surgical procedure necessary to obtain an excellent cosmetic result.

What made you decide to establish Dear Doctor?

I have always been concerned about how much misinformation patients receive and yet, it is often that misinformation that factors into their decision making process. There are a significant number of consumers who want and need to understand dentistry in order to make their health care decisions. My solution was to create Dear Doctor – Dentistry & Oral Health, a magazine that represents dentistry ethically and professionally, providing credibility but, more importantly, improving the doctor-patient relationship and our position in our communities.

How would you describe the content found in Dear Doctor? Is it broken down into specific topics?

Dear Doctor is an educational vehicle that allows dentistry to be interesting and entertaining while teaching about oral health and its connection to general health. So we provide great graphics, visual appeal, top celebrity interviews for human-interest stories and even a little misdirection.

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humor. It is organized into departments of dentistry and our goal was to create a magazine for patients that had the credibility of the New England Journal of Medicine with cutting-edge knowledge.

Why do you believe patient education is the key to effective marketing?

When a doctor provides patients with information that is credible and reliable, it reinforces his own recommendations, and by educating patients it enables patients to make confident and informed health care decisions and decreases procrastination.

Today many are questioning the doctor-patient relationship because it has eroded to some extent. The doctor-patient relationship is based on trust and this can be created and reinforced by the open communication and honesty that comes through education. Patients want to understand the various options available enabling them to make well-informed decisions.

Dear Doctor is not just providing information, it is providing education. It talks about the pros and cons, the indications and contraindications, and gives an explanation as to why certain treatments are needed by patients.

What is the current circulation of Dear Doctor? How many copies of Dear Doctor do you suggest a practice should purchase in order to distribute?

Dear Doctor has, in just over a year, more than tripled its circulation from 50,000 to 100,000. We are very proud of that growth, particularly in this economy.

The nice thing about Dear Doctor is the flexibility it provides. Our total marketing program is extremely comprehensive, allowing internal marketing, external marketing [direct mail] and Internet marketing in addition to patient education all in one magazine. And it’s very cost effective, about $1.45 per magazine plus shipping. It is the most cost-effective promotional tool available for professionals today.

You can choose any component of our marketing program or select sections that you need that supplement your current strategies. Your circulation can be as few as 500 magazines per quarter or as many as you want.

We are also releasing two exciting new products in early 2009. One is the Spanish version named Dear Doctor – Odontología y Salud Oral, en Espanol of which we are very proud. The other product is the online version of Dear Doctor magazine where doctors can purchase our educational material for their Web sites so that they will be able to direct patients to their Web site for additional educational support.

One of the biggest challenges practices face with their Web sites is keeping content fresh. Our digital online edition of Dear Doctor is a great way to keep patients going to your dental practices for their health care information.

How is your time split up now that you are doing Dear Doctor and running your own practice?

That is obviously the most challenging part, running a practice and creating Dear Doctor magazine. There are some things that I did give up, one being teaching, and I am reducing my lecture schedule, so that frees up a fair amount of time. On the practice side, I have a very experienced support group that allows me to handle a lot of things. Importantly, Dear Doctor is an extension of who I am and what I do, so family, practice and magazine are all intertwined. I won’t say it’s easy, but it is a labor of love when you are doing something you really believe in.