

M.D. NEWS

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Crutchfield Dermatology

Experience Counts
and Quality Matters!

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By Marian Deegan

If no one knows about your medical expertise, how can you make a difference? Flourishing in a private practice requires physicians to execute a well-crafted business plan as well as practicing exceptional medicine.

Dr. Crutchfield's formula for success is a combination of medical dedication, visionary business strategy, scrupulous attention to practice planning, deeply felt personal and professional gratitude and a genuine sense of community responsibility.

"Starting a solo practice of medicine is not a task for the faint of heart," admits Dr. Charles E. Crutchfield III, Medical Director of Crutchfield Dermatology. In the five years since he founded his solo practice, Dr. Crutchfield has treated 25,000

patients, many referred by over 500 Twin Cities physicians. He credits his dedicated support staff of over 40 employees for his clinic's top ranking in patient satisfaction by the Fairview Physician Associates. His colleagues (physicians, nurses and other health care providers) have been kind enough to regularly select Dr. Crutchfield as a "Top Dermatologist" in *Minneapolis-St. Paul Magazine* and as a "Top Dermatologist for Women" in *Minnesota Monthly* magazine and one of the "Best Doctors in America" in a national survey. This summer he received the "Healthcare Hero Award" from *Medica* and *Twin Cities Business* magazine, and was appointed the "Official Team Dermatologist" of the Minnesota Twins.

Crutchfield Dermatology is the leading provider of cosmetic

The Spa at Crutchfield Dermatology is a leading provider of physician-administered cosmetic dermatology services in Minnesota.





Dr. Crutchfield's parents at their graduation from the University of Minnesota Medical School in 1963 and Dr. Crutchfield, age 3.

dermatology services in Minnesota, though cosmetic dermatology represents only a quarter of his practice. The majority is devoted to medical dermatology. Crutchfield Dermatology is an “Acne and Psoriasis Care Center of Excellence,” with additional specialties in port wine birthmarks, vitiligo, atopic eczema, skin cancer and ethnic skin problems. The clinic is one of only a few in the Twin Cities area with UVB phototherapy treatment equipment. Dr. Crutchfield also offers treatments on the forefront of technology, including the Aramis laser, used in acne treatment, and the new PIXEL laser for the treatment of acne scars. On the cosmetic dermatology side, they specialize in minimally invasive cosmetic procedures such as Botox Cosmetic, Restylane, medical peels, Javani microdermabrasion facial treatments, and many advanced light and laser treatments for skin fitness and rejuvenation. Dr. Crutchfield is also a pioneer in LipoDissolve *Ultra*, a technique that melts fat

and cellulite away without surgery. “My philosophy is simple: I do not want to make anyone look younger than they are; I just want them to look fantastic for their age. If you do too much it looks odd. Really, less is more. I want my patients’ friends to look at them and be what I call ‘enviously confused’ after one of my treatments,” he smiles. His appointment calendar is often scheduled out several months in advance.

As a clinical associate professor of dermatology at the University of Minnesota Medical School, Dr. Crutchfield lectures and teaches the medical students and dermatology residents regularly. In fact, the medical students have given him several teaching awards, including “Teacher of the Year.” He also has an appointment as a biology professor at Carleton College, teaching “Cutaneous Biology for the Premedical Student” every spring. Dr. Crutchfield stays abreast of medical advances, lecturing both nationally and internationally. He has co-authored

a textbook of dermatology and written over 100 medical articles. His clinic is active in research, conducting antioxidant research for skin rejuvenation and genetic studies for psoriasis. Dr. Crutchfield designates specific blocks of time each week for medical education. He also carves out weekly time for tending to the finer points of running a medical practice.

“I think I’ve been lucky,” Dr. Crutchfield reflects. “I stand on the shoulders of giants, and I don’t take that for granted. My mother was the first African-American woman and, at the time, the youngest person to graduate from the University of Minnesota Medical School. My mother is a retired family practitioner. My father is an actively practicing obstetrician and gynecologist. He has delivered 10,000 babies in Saint Paul. Today, many of them are my patients. My parents taught me to plan my work, and work my plan. I still pick up the phone and consult with them on business concerns on a weekly basis. My wife directs all of our office finances and, in conjunction with Resurrection Media, directs our website development. She has been essential to our success.

“Family, teachers and professors — so many people have helped me along the way,” he recalls. “I’ve learned so many patient and business lessons throughout my educational journey, from Minnehaha Academy, Carleton College, Mayo Medical School and Gundersen Clinic to the University of Minnesota. It’s important to me to give back to my community because I know I’m not here by accident. We support the local schools, the Rochester Reading Center for Dyslexia and Camp Discovery for children with skin disorders.” When Carleton College undergraduate students needed money to attend a conference for premedical students of color, Dr. Crutchfield provided a scholarship for all of them. “I’ve been helped, and now I am in a position to help,” he explains simply.

From Dr. Crutchfield’s point of view, successful promotion facilitates his desire to make a difference. He recalls

his first year of residency, when he treated a teen named Donnie for acne. “Donnie’s mother called to thank me,” he remembers. “She told me that her son had always been too embarrassed to go out because his acne looked so bad. After his skin cleared up, Donnie got a job and managed to save enough to buy a car. That car was always breaking down, but Donnie loved the freedom it afforded him. And then Donnie had an epiphany; he told his mom that in order to get a nice car he needed a better job, and that meant a college degree. Donnie was the first child in his family to consider college. And, with his newfound confidence, he found the courage to ask a girl to senior prom and she said, ‘Yes.’

“After that call, I thought, ‘Wow.’ Donnie’s got a car, he’s got a job, he’s got a date for the prom and he’s going to college. Hey! Chalk one up for dermatology. Here’s a profession where you can really make a difference. I knew I was going into the right field.”

After completing his residency, Dr. Crutchfield joined St.

Crutchfield Dermatology prides itself on having a friendly and professional staff.



Paul's Dermatology Consultants. At a national dermatology conference, he was introduced to two revolutionary concepts: the "one nurse per exam room" practice model and electronic medical records. "Physician and nurses working in partnership as a team — it was a terrific idea," he recalls. "And I saw the potential of electronic medical record systems to address my frustrations with the old charting system. I've never enjoyed dictating or handwriting my chart notes. I was educated and trained to diagnose and treat patients. I wanted to focus on doing what I enjoyed: diagnosing and treating my patients.

"Dermatology Consultants was a terrific group of physicians," he says, "but I wanted to try a practice style that was a little bit different. I knew that a solo practice would give me the autonomy to entertain fresh business ideas and implement new processes rapidly. After a very cordial parting with my partners, I was ready to launch my own practice."

Dr. Crutchfield learned that his electronic medical records consultant was affiliated with a group specializing in medical clinic startups and retained them to help locate office space, hire staff, become credentialed with independent payers and insurance companies, and select a banker, corporate attorney and accountant. "I was very lucky to make that connection with Healthcare Management Resources," he says. "The experience taught me the value of hiring professionals. I could select my office furniture, design my stationery and handle my own billing, but these things are too important not to be handled by experts. I hire decorators, graphic designers and

Dr. Crutchfield performing one of over 5,000 laser surgeries.

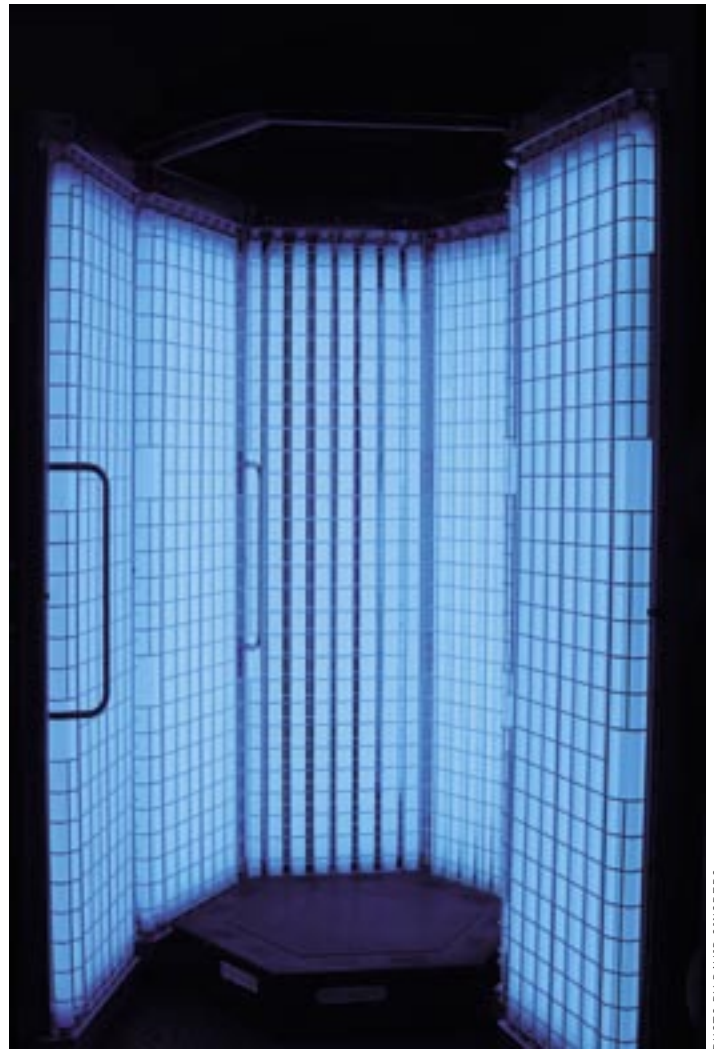


PHOTO BY DAVID GINSBERG

Crutchfield Dermatology has the largest phototherapy center in the Midwest, treating psoriasis, vitiligo, atopic eczema and other skin conditions.

outsource my billing to a prominent national dermatology-coding specialist to do what they are best at. That frees me up to concentrate on my strengths and priorities: treating my patients, managing my business and enjoying my family.

"Our practice has enjoyed very rewarding growth over the last five years," he acknowledges. "But we are always striving to do better.

"My motto is 'constant and never-ending improvement,'" Dr. Crutchfield says. "At every staff meeting, I ask two vital questions: 'What can we do to serve our patients better and what can we do to make our practice run better?' We have a reward program for staff suggestions that lead to improvements. The success of our practice does come with its share of growing pains — timely appointments and running on time, but we are constantly working to get better. Unfortunately, medical 'office appointments' are not the same as 'restaurant reservations,' and, much to my disliking, we do run behind sometimes. Some patients may need unexpected time for their challenging medical conditions or to discuss their new diagnosis of



Above: Dr. Crutchfield's three children: Olivia, age 7, Charles IV, age 4, and Arianna, age 1, with one of the famous "Crutchfield Dermatology Ducks."

Right: Laurie Crutchfield is both the director of financial affairs and website consultant.

cancer. Often we are asked to see a patient on an emergency basis by another physician. If someone is extremely time sensitive, our practice is probably not for them. Acknowledging this is good for everyone. Select timing issues aside, once we see a patient our focus is providing the highest quality patient care available."

Dr. Crutchfield implements an aggressive and diverse marketing strategy, tracking advertising results meticulously. "We ask every single caller and patient how he or she heard about our practice," he says. "I review these reports on a weekly basis. I know exactly what strategies are successful and which ones need corrections consistent with our marketing budget and goals, and I don't waste any time making necessary adjustments because it is vital for the health of our practice."

In just the past five years, I've seen a huge swing from *Yellow*



PHOTO PROVIDED BY CRUTCHFIELD DERMATOLOGY



Dr. Crutchfield actively teaches at the University of Minnesota Medical School.

Pages advertising to quality Internet presence. Today, Crutchfield Dermatology's *Yellow Pages* presence is pared down to one line of bold copy with the clinic name, phone number and Web address. "Our practice is more established now, and our primary marketing emphasis is on our award-winning, content-rich website," he explains. "Besides, our appointment schedule is full to the point that heavy *Yellow Pages* advertising would be a detriment. It's frustrating for any patient with a pressing problem to call us, only to learn that we can't see them for several months. If your advertising creates frustration, things need to be adjusted, but it is a careful and constant balancing act."

Dr. Crutchfield addresses his booking issue by leveraging clinic cancellations. "All practices have cancellations," he says. "We invite patients with flexible schedules to call every couple of days and check for cancelled appointments. We can usually fit these patients in within a month."

Every aspect of patient contact is viewed as an opportunity to foster patient satisfaction. "When a patient walks into the office, they'll find fresh cut flowers and a reception desk display offering free skincare samples," Dr. Crutchfield says. "A flat-screen TV presents video information about the different services that we offer. The entire office area, including exam rooms, offers WiFi connection for patients who'd like to maximize their productivity during downtime. I am very proud of our 'firsts'; we were the first dermatology clinic in Minnesota to use electronic medical records and the first dermatology clinic in the United States to offer WiFi throughout our office for patient use. We've received several business

recognition awards from the local chamber of commerce and regional business publications and several national awards have recognized the clinic's vibrant monthly newsletter. We are actually a publisher," Dr. Crutchfield states. "Our newsletter is delivered electronically to a group of almost 10,000 patients, physicians and nurses every month.

"Marketing a practice is essential," he states. "If you have a great clinic and no one knows about it, what difference does it make? Marketing a practice is something that causes some physicians to become uncomfortable, but it really just makes good business sense. I have a philosophy of marketing: You have to be genuine. You have to offer the highest quality care. You have to support your referring physicians and patients. And everything you do reflects on your practice. *Everything*.

"I belong to an international group of physicians who own their own practices," Dr. Crutchfield explains. "We meet three times a year to share ideas, successes and failures. We call it a 'mastermind group' and it has been invaluable for my practice."

When a patient told him about a supply of huge yellow rubber ducks, Dr. Crutchfield bought a thousand, remembering his own childhood dread of doctor visits and hoping that the ducks would reassure young patients. Today, his website includes a page devoted to snapshots of grinning tots hugging their "Crutchfield Ducks."

Although Dr. Crutchfield employs an arsenal of disciplined promotional strategies and imaginative marketing tools, he emphasizes repeatedly that people are at the heart of his success.

"Our practice would be nothing without our referring physicians and exceptional staff," he says, "and I am so appreciative. I make it a point to do anything I can to better serve our referring physicians and support educational events for our staff.

"Another advantage is that I see every medical patient in our clinic; I don't have ancillary staff manage their care," Dr. Crutchfield points out. "I am one of the few physicians who actually performs Botox Cosmetic and Restylane treatments myself. At our clinic, when it comes to cosmetic treatments, 'the doctor makes the difference.' I've received great feedback from referring physicians that they really appreciate the personal care that I give to the patients that they refer to us."

All of Dr. Crutchfield's referring physicians receive his electronic 'Case of the Month,' which presents photographs of an interesting case along with Dr. Crutchfield's discussion of diagnosis and approaches to treatment. "It's a way for me to show my

appreciation to the referring physicians, nurses and other health care providers who have helped build our practice. We send the 'Crutchfield Dermatology Photographic Case of the Month' to almost 3,000 health care providers *every month*," he explains.

"I really believe that the education and genuine level of caring by our staff at Crutchfield Dermatology is second to none," he says firmly. "I will admit that the level of cost is significant, but my outstanding reception and nursing staff is one of the strongest points of my clinic. The reception staff attends regular seminars on exceptional customer service. All nurses go through a special four-month training program developed to cultivate attention to detail, patient education and overall quality of patient care. Nurses have an active role in educating patients. They have to know the language of dermatology and be conversant with the many different types of diagnosis in this specialty. Each of

our nurses and reception staff has a personal business card, so patients can call directly when they need help. We were recognized with a national award for support of nursing education because we were the first dermatology clinic to send all of our nurses to national nursing education conferences."

As a young resident, Dr. Crutchfield's help transformed the life of a shy teenager named Donnie. Today, his commitment to promotion has positioned him to make a difference in 25,000 more lives. Integrating medical practice with business promotion may not be a task for the faint of heart, but Dr. Crutchfield makes a compelling case that it's a task worth tackling. "For me," he says, "it is so rewarding to be part of our stellar care team. We are dedicated and passionate about making a difference in our patients' lives. My practice is a joy. I really believe that *Experience Counts and Quality Matters.*" ■

Dr. Crutchfield and several of the office staff



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