

# Building a Cardiology Practice

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## Abstract

This study was designed to quantify the clinical and marketing effectiveness of the Pocket EKG Clinical Based Marketing Program by measuring its impact on new patient visits, patient satisfaction, payor negotiations, and patient management at Pikes Peak Cardiology (PPC), Colorado Springs, Colorado. New patient visits were found to increase by 22% for 6.5 consecutive years. Ninety-two percent of patients surveyed found that the Pocket EKG Card promoted loyalty to the cardiology practice. The Pocket EKG Patient Satisfaction Survey was proven to satisfy Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set (HEDIS) guidelines as required in payor contracting. Finally, access to a baseline electrocardiogram contributed to a 54% reduction in unnecessary hospitalization. The Pocket EKG Clinical Based Marketing Program proved to successfully market PPC to its three customers: patients, payors, and primary care physicians.

## Introduction

In today's competitive health care environment, marketing is becoming increasingly important to the success of medical group practices. This case study discusses how

one cardiology practice implemented a new marketing program called Pocket EKG. The implementation process; the perception of the program by the physicians, administrator, staff, and patients; and the marketing outcomes will be examined.

Pikes Peak Cardiology (PPC), LLP has 11 cardiologists and is located in Colorado Springs, Colorado. After the idea of the Pocket EKG Card was introduced by senior partner David I. Greenberg, the group saw the clinical value of the card for patients, as well as the potential marketing value of the service for the practice, and decided to begin the service in January 1997.

## Outline of Pocket EKG Clinical Based Marketing Program

The Pocket EKG Clinical Based Marketing Program is based around the Pocket EKG Card, which is a heart identification card the size and shape of a credit card designed to fit in a patient's wallet. On the front of the card is the patient's complete cardiac history, as well as the sponsoring organization's name, logo, address, and phone number. On the back of the card is the patient's baseline EKG (Figure 1).

The marketing value of the card is to enhance word-of-mouth referrals and link patients to the physician's practice. This direct link between the patient and the cardiologist has definitive clinical value for the patient as well. "Treatment by the cardiologist is associated with approximately 17% reduction in hospital mortality in acute myocardial infarction patients"<sup>1</sup> versus in hospital treatment by a primary care physician. The clinical value for patients to have their baseline EKG with them at all times is also well documented: "There is a 54% reduction in unnecessary hospitalization when a physician has access to a prior EKG."<sup>2</sup> This card can be a simple solution to address the "estimated \$12 billion cost of unnecessary admission to the hospital of patients with chest pain."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, according to *The American Journal of Medicine*, "79% of physicians find a baseline EKG to be extremely valuable when making diagnostic and treatment decisions for heart patients."<sup>4</sup>

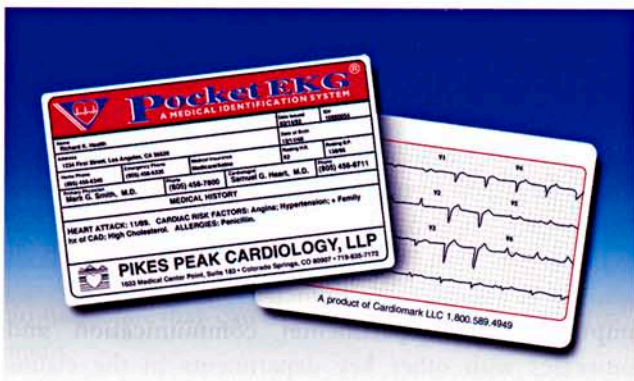


Figure 1. The Pocket EKG Card.

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Along with the card, there are a variety of services included in the Pocket EKG Clinical Based Marketing Program aimed at promoting the physician practice:

- Patient satisfaction survey in compliance with HEDIS National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) guidelines.
- EKG Screening Kit for use at local health fairs.
- Media kit to distribute information about Pocket EKG and the physician group to the local media.
- Patient education materials.

### Goals and Objectives

Pikes Peak Cardiology wanted to differentiate itself from the competition not only by providing the highest quality of medical care but also by adding value to its medical practice with the Pocket EKG Card and services. PPC had three goals when it began this program.

First and foremost was the Patient Satisfaction Survey. When a patient receives a Pocket EKG Card, the survey is included. Cardiomark then collects the data from the returned surveys and issues a quarterly report that is both physician-specific and cumulative for the entire practice. This material is valuable for two reasons: it is reported by an objective third party, which adds credibility; and it is also in compliance with HEDIS/NCQA guidelines that payors are looking at when contracting with physician groups.

A second consideration was to provide a clinical service to patients that promoted rapid and accurate treatment. There have been numerous incidents when a patient with an abnormal EKG presented to the emergency room with a Pocket EKG Card and was saved from being unnecessarily admitted to the hospital.

The third reason for implementing the Pocket EKG Clinical Based Marketing Program was for patient retention and recruitment. Colorado Springs includes many seniors who travel to warmer climates during the winter. The Pocket EKG Card adds to their sense of security if they have to go to an emergency room far from home.

### The 3 P's of Cardiology Marketing

Pikes Peak Cardiology wanted to increase its patient volume. The design of the Pocket EKG Clinical Based Marketing Program focuses on the 3 P's of marketing cardiology:

- Patients.
- Payors.
- Primary Care Physicians.

#### Patients

The patients' needs would be met with the Pocket EKG Card, which links the patient to the practice.

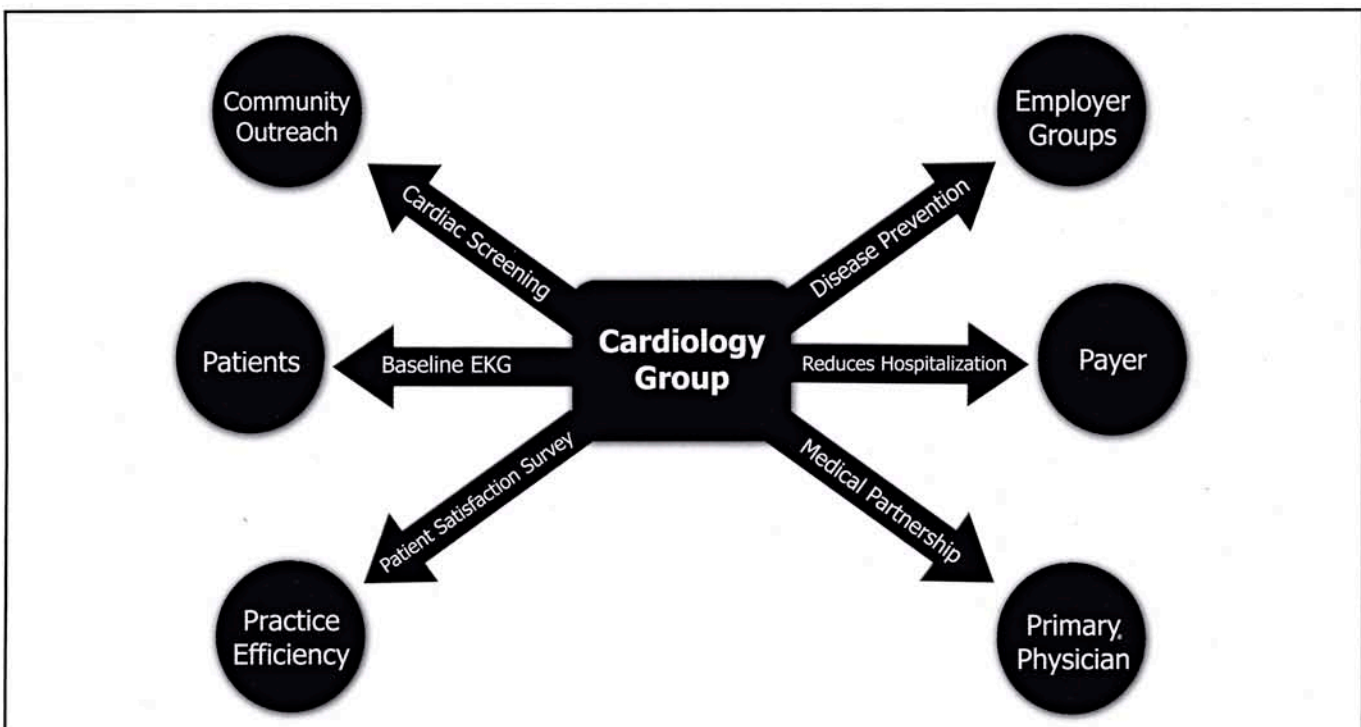


Figure 2. The Pocket EKG business development program.



### Payors

In order to better market the group to the payors, William Mantia, administrator of PPC, felt that he needed the data supplied by the Patient Satisfaction Survey Report that was included in the program. With this information, he has valuable data when contracting with the payors.

### Primary Care Physicians

When promoting the practice to its referring physicians, PPC sent out a letter announcing the availability of the Pocket EKG Service. A place on the front of the card highlights the referring physician as well as the cardiologist by name and phone number. Through the Pocket EKG Card, this sort of medical care partnership is formed. Figure 2 demonstrates the business development goals of PPC with the Pocket EKG Program.

### Budget

The cost of this program is \$15 per patient with a one-time enrollment fee of \$500. Pikes Peak Cardiology began tracking its EKG services more closely and used the reimbursement from the EKG to offset the cost of the Pocket EKG Card. By capturing all the patients requiring an EKG, the group found that the cost for the Pocket EKG Program was at a break-even point.

The satisfaction data gathered from the patients enrolled in the program is information that would not otherwise be available to us without incurring a considerable cost. Combining the survey process within a program that enhances clinical care delivery is cost-effective for the group.

### Implementation

To implement the program, management has to not only say this is what is going to happen but also provide the means to make it happen. For this reason, a floater person was hired to assist in the actual implementation of the Pocket EKG program. For a patient to receive a Pocket EKG Card, there is a simple, one-page patient data form that is filled out to generate the information on the front of the card. This form is attached to an EKG printout. The patient form and EKG are mailed to Cardiomark, where the card is manufactured and mailed back directly to the patient along with the patient satisfaction survey.

A Pocket EKG Protocol was implemented to streamline the delivery of the service. The following criteria are used to identify and issue a Pocket EKG Card:

- New patient.
- Recent percutaneous coronary interventions.

- Recent permanent pacemaker.
- Recent heart surgery.
- Recent myocardial infarction.
- Patients identified as having an arrhythmia.

Some of the inefficiencies with the implementation were found in the completing of the medical history portion of the patient data form. This information had to be completed by a nurse, and this task was sometimes found to be too time consuming. Also, when a patient needed to have an EKG, the availability of a place to do the test and staffing to perform the test were obstacles at times. This is where the staff floater person was of great assistance.

### Outcomes

Pikes Peak Cardiology has seen three major outcomes since implementing the Pocket EKG Clinical Based Marketing Program.

First and foremost was an increase in new patients seen in the office. After launching the Pocket EKG program, PPC experienced a 22% average annual increase in new patient visits for 6.5 years.

Second, having the data from the Pocket EKG Patient Satisfaction Survey Reports when contracting with payors is a definite advantage. The payors are surprised that a physician group has these data available, but the fact that the data were compiled and reported by an objective third party makes the information even more compelling.

A third outcome is the tremendous sense of security that the Pocket EKG Card gives to patients. "I think the Pocket EKG is a valuable tool for both the patient and the physician. It is an extra safety precaution to have. I keep it in my wallet right next to my driver's license," said Greg Gardiner, a cardiac patient. The Pocket EKG Card is seen as almost a status symbol by our patients. The success of any business is determined through building long-term, loyal relationships with customers.

### References

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