



ADIA

ASSOCIATION OF DENTAL IMPLANT AUXILIARIES

WAYS TO KEEP YOUR PATIENTS HAPPY AND TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL CASE PRESENTATIONS

by Lynn D. Terracciano-Mortilla, RDH

Did you ever stop and wonder what causes patients to avoid or refuse dental treatment or, worse yet, leave your practice? Since dental professionals are trained to help others, we seldom ask our patients to help us. Here are a couple of tips to help encourage patients to accept treatment and ways to be sure your patients are satisfied with the care you are providing for them. I'm sure this isn't going to be the first or last time you've heard these things discussed, but repetition yields positive results.

Ask the patient their desires. It's essential at a patient's first visit that a rapport is developed with that patient. One of the first questions I ask a patient (especially a patient new to the practice) is what they did or didn't like about their previous dental office. This simple question provides answers that will tell you how this patient likes to be treated. For example, some patients will tell me that they like a lot of conversation and others will say they prefer little conversation. Can you imagine not asking this question and trying to carry on conversation for a one hour appointment with a patient who prefers silence? It could reduce your patient base by one. Or you can ask what patients want, give it to them and have a satisfied patient that refers friends and family and helps to increase your patient base. With patients of record, asking them what they do and don't like about their dental visits proves to the patient that their needs and desires are still your number one concern. How could you know that a patient wants fixed bridge work rather than an overdenture if you didn't ask them? Be sure to write

down what the patient tells you. If you forget Mrs. Jones likes morning appointments and keep offering her afternoon appointments, Mrs. Jones is going to feel like a nameless face and since patients are not the best judges of quality dentistry vs. mediocre dentistry, Mrs. Jones will go to an office that makes her feel like she is getting individualized treatment.

Avoid discrediting other professionals to make yourself look good. This is a golden rule. Do unto others...etc. Everyone has seen a poor margin on a restoration and everyone has probably done one. Others could also complain about how uncomfortable your injections are or what poor bedside manner your assistant has or how rude the person that answers your phone is. The point is no one is perfect and you have no right to criticize another licensed professional. The person you discredit may have been the patient's nephew or grandfather. Now how would you talk yourself out of that situation?

Don't ignore the patient's concerns or dismiss their fears. Though you need to reassure patients, don't dominate the conversation. Let them tell you how they feel and then calmly reassure them or discuss the concerns they may have. Wisdom tooth removal may seem routine for an oral surgeon, but it's a surgical procedure to the patient in the chair.

Invite questions. I once thought being able to spew forth vast amounts of dental education would make me look knowledgeable to patients. I soon realized that being able to knowledgeably answer *their* questions made them feel like I understood them and

had their best interest in mind. Patients ask questions when they feel unsure or are confused and don't understand. If someone asks a question they will listen to the response because they requested it.

Talk about fees and finances. Usually patients won't accept treatment unless they know in advance how much it will cost. Hidden charges irritate any consumer so be honest and up front. It's always better to overestimate rather than tack on an additional cost to a procedure. If there is absolutely no way a patient can afford a \$5,000 procedure, the benefits of that procedure really won't matter to them as much as the other options available for treatment. Some people are uncomfortable discussing fees. If that's the case, hire someone who is perfectly comfortable discussing finances as well as payment options and arrangements.

Don't give too much information. The more you talk the less patients hear. An abundance of information isn't always necessary. You would much better serve the patient if you told them pertinent information at that moment and gave them the abundance to take home and read. Have a team member follow up with a phone call a day or so later. Legally, a patient must be presented with all viable treatment options, the benefits of and consequences of not pursuing treatment. You shouldn't be doing all the talking. If you are, you may be confusing your patients or trying to "persuade" them to do the treatment you prefer instead of having the patients commit to the treatment they want (these are the patients that cancel a

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four hour appointment forty-five minutes before the appointment). If you interact with the patient and involve them as part of the conversation, they won't feel like you're trying to talk them into something.

Ask for referrals when a patient tells you how happy they are with the work you have done for them and the services you have provided. All patients will tell others when something goes wrong. We should encour-

age our patients to tell others when things go right as well. When someone gets a great new haircut, the first question people ask is "Where did you have it done?". Since it's not always easy to recognize someone's dental work and not all patients want to tell others that their teeth might not necessarily be natural, encourage patients to tell friends and family that you would be more than happy to treat them as well.

These are not unique techniques. Mostly they are just things that need to be devel-

oped or remembered, no matter how busy we get. The key to making these techniques successful is having the entire team practice these suggestions so everyone presents the same image of your practice. Hopefully, these tips will help your patients realize that you don't just care about their dental work, you care about their needs.