

Ensuring a Positive Practice Environment

Keep Your Patients Coming Back

As the U.S. economy continues to recover, many dental practices are focusing increasingly on acquiring new patients through in-office referrals and marketing efforts. Though acquiring new patients is an important part of creating a financially viable practice, it's just the first part of the challenge. Once patients walk through the door, we must work hard to create a positive environment that will keep them coming back. Great dentistry is certainly a must, but a friendly, positive staff and a consistent commitment to dental excellence are equally important in creating patient loyalty.

Courteous office services

The Internet has changed dramatically and forever the way in which patients find their dentists, because these days many patients go online to sites like Google, Yelp, and Facebook to see which practices and providers others recommend. In order to ensure positive feedback on these sites and gain the attention of prospective patients, we must provide quality dental care and show patients just how important they are to us.

All this starts when a prospective patient calls or visits your office for the first time. The office member answering the phone or meeting the patient when he or she walks in must have a pleasant voice and a friendly disposition. Your office members must be able to empathize with these patients while explaining the services you offer, answering questions, and scheduling appointments. Additionally, if time allows, your office staff should follow up any new patient phone calls with a letter welcoming these patients to the practice before their first scheduled appointment. These small efforts help create a positive, welcoming environment for all of your new and returning patients.

Professional patient care

Once the patient has arrived, continue to be welcoming and attentive as you strive to exceed his or her expectations. It is imperative that the dental team members communicate the patient's specific concerns with one another. Make sure

to keep detailed notes in the patient's chart that document everything discussed during the appointment. This consistent attention to detail will not only keep your patients coming back but also protect the practice. Consistency is mandatory to ensure a positive patient environment.

Staff members who can speak clearly and effectively to patients are an asset to any dental office, especially if they are responsible for answering the phone. Patients frequently call to ask questions, and they need to feel that they are speaking to someone who understands those questions. We may not have all of the answers, but our patients need to know that we understand what is being asked of us and that we can help find a solution to their problem.

Front office staff should have a good grasp of dental terminology, which is important for both communicating to other team members and interacting with patients. Teaching front office staff the dental terms and procedure codes will ensure that everyone communicates with the patient in the same way, once again promoting consistency in all of the patient's communications with your dental team.

Sincere, consistent, and knowledgeable team members are vital to any successful dental practice. Dentists are only as good as the team with which they surround themselves. It is important that everyone works together to make the patient's dental visit a positive experience so that he or she would recommend your office to family and friends. Good dentists are everywhere, but an exceptional team that works together to make patients feel welcome and safe is a rare gem—and this is what we should all work hard to achieve. ♦



Lisa M. Spradley, FAADOM, has more than 15 years of experience in the dental field as an office manager for a general dentist and a dental consultant. Through her business, TCB Dental Consulting, she trains dental front office staffs in front office management systems. Spradley is a fellow and active lifetime member of the American Association of Dental Office Managers. Contact her at impact@agd.org.