



# TAKE THE WEIGHT OFF YOUR SHOULDERS

Dental practices are now aware that they have to operate in a very different way to previous decades. In fact, it is great to meet practice owners that are describing themselves as owning a dental business! In this article Dental Consultant, **Laura Horton** discusses how practices are moving forward and why the treatment co-ordinator role helps to reduce your non-clinical workload.

## The hats

Principal dentists often wear many hats in their life from dentist, practice manager, business owner, mentor, repair man/woman, spouse, father / mother, friend – no wonder the profession suffers with high stress levels. I am continually meeting practice owners that I find inspiring- purely due to the way they have a clear vision and the way they manage their life!

How am I meeting these business owners? By personally implementing treatment coordinators into their dental business to help them with their workload and reduce their non-clinical time so they can do more of what they enjoy – dentistry.

The role of the Treatment Co-ordinator (TCO) is something that needs to operate efficiently in your business. The role needs to be

performed consistently and to a high standard, ensuring that every patient's experience of the practice is of a high quality.

Implementing the role of the treatment co-ordinator has many benefits to your dental practice, specifically if:

- The role provides outstanding customer service to your new and existing patients
- increases levels of communication between the patients the team and the dentists
- increases your level of treatment acceptance – as patients can make well-informed decisions
- builds value into the practice and into the treatment in relation to the fee
- **and at the end of the calendar month, it increases your turnover** - sometimes significantly.

## How do I know this?

When I work with a practice, we measure their conversion rates and average practice new patient spend per month for three months prior to my visit and every month thereafter – this is one of the TCO's responsibilities.

I find that practices increase their conversion rates on treatment uptake on average from 50-60% per month to 75-87% per month, and increase their average new patient spend on their first treatment plan from £300-£1000 to £750 - £3000 depending on the type of practice you own.

In short, you can expect to increase your turnover by 20-40% each month, if not more. One practice I worked with increased their turnover by 80% in the first month. This is the most outstanding by all but shows you what can be achieved when you use a TCO and have effective systems in place that fall in line with your business model.

## What types of practices are implementing the role of TCO?

- General practice
- Mixed practice (for private and NHS patients)
- Implant practices
- Cosmetic practices
- Referral practices
- Orthodontic practices

## What does the role involve?

The role of treatment co-ordinator has three parts:

1. Holding free of charge non-clinical consultations for new or existing patients who are not sure about the options available to them or do not want to commit fully at the point of the first phone call.

Free 'smile' consultations are a great way to get your phone ringing and they make the life of the front desk team much easier. When you work on the front desk and hear at the end of the call, "I will call you back, I need to think about it" it's very disheartening. It is much nicer to offer the patients you are going to lose a free appointment with a team member to help convert them into one of your patients.

Here is how the appointment can be offered to a patient on the telephone who is unlikely to book an appointment at the practice:

*"Mrs Smith, I have two options for you now : option one is to come in for a complimentary consultation to see Laura. Laura is an extremely knowledgeable and friendly **team member**, she can talk you through all the treatment options available and show you results that we have achieved for patients in a similar situation as yourself, while having a coffee and a chat. The second option is to come and see the dentist for a clinical oral health assessment.*

*However, a fee of £80 will apply for this appointment, what would you like to do?"*

A structured conversation is then held with the patient when they visit the practice. **The TCO is not recommending treatment**; if a patient has a missing tooth they will explain that their options are:

- a. Do nothing
- b. Dentures
- c. Bridges
- d. Implants

If the patient would like to know more, they are advised to schedule a new patient assessment so they know exactly what they are suitable for.

2. Helping dentists with their treatment planning, such as:
  - a. Entering the prescribed treatment plan onto the software
  - b. Collating consents and estimates
  - c. Gathering information sheets relevant to the case

They will be with the dentist when the treatment plan goes onto the software and they get the dentist exactly what is needed in terms of paperwork and visual aids to present the options with.

3. Helping dentists with the treatment presentation once the dentist has explained all of the options, risks and fees. At this point the dentist can leave the room and the TCO can then take over, go through the paperwork, organise the finances and book the appointments (all of this happens away from the front desk).

They present and explain all the options to the patient and then if the patient wants to go ahead there and then, they help the patient to schedule the appointments and organise the finances – away from the front desk. ➡



“ With a good TCO, I find that practices increase their conversion rates on treatment uptake by an average of 40-50% per month. ”

TCOs are highly skilled members of the team. They're experts at building relationships, building value and have exceptional verbal skills.

### People buy from people they like

Relationships are key to your success. I often describe the new patient experience similar to that of dating.

Imagine if you had a date and the person you were dating:

- Asked you how you were at the start of the date
- Thereafter did nothing but talk about themselves
- Showed no interest in you
- Did not talk about your past and learn how you arrived in your current situation
- Did not take account of your feelings and only talked in facts
- Talked about their work constantly in jargon you didn't understand?

You wouldn't be dating this person for very long would you?

So why do some dentists have this type of relationship with their patients?

I teach Treatment Co-ordinators the art of active listening. When you become a good listener you build relationships, then people buy from people they like.

TCO's responsibilities during the new patient consultation is to:

- Provide outstanding customer service
- Build a relationship with the patient
- build value into the treatment in relation to the fee

### The goal is to schedule the new patient assessment with the dentist at another date

Building value is an essential process that is all too often forgotten when discussing treatment options and fees with your patients'.

The message in your brand must be delivered at all times during the NP appointment. The TCO can easily talk about you as clinicians and tell the patient how great you are, they can continually ensure the practice's unique selling points (USPs) are known to the patient.

It is important to ask the patient if they've got a budget you need to work towards, listen to the patient and discuss their treatment options, make them aware how much they may need to spend. Always discuss the rough fees at the first appointment, so you can determine the interest level and help the patient by explaining finance options they can use.

Proving what you can do using your personal portfolio of work is important. It is no good showing visual aids only, and / or a combination of stock photographs – this does not increase your credibility!

It is always important to ask the patient what they want to do next, and explain the next stepping-stone – the new patient assessment with the dentist to confirm what options they are suitable for and the exact fee.

### Verbal skills

Confidence is key and practise makes perfect.

Treatment Co-ordinators must have exquisite verbal skills for descriptions of treatment options, building value, selling the new patient assessment, taking deposits and overcoming objections.



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Remember, it is not what you say but the way in which you say it!

Your body language, tone of voice, pace and eye contact are all important factors in the delivery, which again brings me back to how important it is to practice the descriptions that you use as everything that you say has to be delivered in a positive way.

### Where do you start?

In your practice you need to choose at least two people to take on this role. I always advise to have a main TCO and then a back-up, for holidays, sickness and maternity leave. They could also do a job share two days a week. TCO's can be members of the clinical or non-clinical team as they are not having a clinical conversation with the patient. However, you must remember that the front desk team is already experienced at answering patients questions about their treatment plans on a daily basis.

You do not need to start using this role full-time, it is a role that can be built up to the practice. You can start with one day a week and build this up as the role grows.

It is also ideal for your patients to be seen in a non-clinical environment but if you have to use a treatment room there is still plenty you can do to make the room welcoming.

To make this role successful in your practice your TCO needs to operate to a fully functioning system within the business so it is important that focused training is undertaken.

# LOOK! WE FOUND A REAL LIFE TCO

## 1. What was your role in the practice before you became the TCO?

My role as the Treatment Co-ordinator falls within my overall role as Clinic Manager; it is a busy and varied role with the aim of ensuring that the practice runs smoothly and efficiently. I ensure the team of staff and dentist keep up-to-date with current legislations and guidelines and provide the patients with excellent customer service. I also ensure that patients are introduced to the Natural Smiles brand and patient experience.

## 2. How has your role changed since you took on the role of TCO?

With my love of people interaction and with over 20 years of dental experience, I love working with patients on one-to-one basis helping them to reach their dental goals, whether it be to become totally and completely healthy or a complete image makeover.

## 3. What attributes would you say are important to being a successful TCO?

A Treatment Co-ordinator is someone who actually specialises in creating relationships with the patients and qualities that are needed to fulfil the role are:

- enthusiasm about the practice and treatments on offer
- being an excellent listener, asking effective questions and being empathetic to patients' needs
- being highly organised and structured
- having excellent communication skills
- having good understanding of the dental profession
- and always being a professional.

## 4. What tangible difference has the role made to the practice?

In many ways...

- improved customer service
- increased patient empathy
- Reduction on no shows and short notice cancellations
- Allows the dentist to return to productive dentistry
- Number of new patients
- Increased income
- It also adds an extra element that sets the practice apart from other practices.

## CAROL BOYD

Carol is a Treatment Coordinator at the Natural Smiles Dental and Beauty Spa in Corby, Northamptonshire.

## 5. What lessons have you learned in the role?

Never judge a book by its cover! Never pre judge your patient's ability and willingness to pay for your services.

## 6. What do you most enjoy in the role?

I enjoy playing a role in creating beautiful smiles; my primary goal is to make the first visit as enjoyable and informative as possible. I strive to make every patient smile and laugh and go above and beyond to ensure that all new patients have a clear understanding of the value of a healthy smile.

## 7. Has the role helped you to understand the needs of customers more?

I have found that one of the main reasons why patients don't go ahead with treatment, is because they don't really understand the concept of what is being offered and the specific benefits to them.

They often feel uncomfortable about asking lots of questions, so I spend time with patients going through different options to suit their needs without the patients feeling as though they are wasting our time.

## 8. Would you recommend the role of TCO to other practices?

To take your practice to the next level I would highly recommend the role of TCO to other practices, it will significantly increase production and profitability. It also adds an extra element that sets your practice apart from other practices. 📌

## Laura Horton works with dentists and their teams to increase sales and profits with proven successful methods.

Laura has worked with dentists and their teams from 2005 and since 2008 through her own company Laura Horton Consulting LTD. Laura is the UK's leading Treatment Coordinator Trainer. Laura worked in practice for 13 years and has an unrivalled passion and enthusiasm for treatment coordination. In mid 2008 Laura left her full-time practice management role.

Ever since, with her years of experience and vast amount of knowledge, Laura has been successfully implementing the treatment coordinator role into dental practices throughout the UK, helping dental practices to develop into customer-focused businesses, which outperform their competition.

To find out more about Laura, you can visit her website [www.laurahortonconsulting.co.uk](http://www.laurahortonconsulting.co.uk) email [laura@laurahortonconsulting.co.uk](mailto:laura@laurahortonconsulting.co.uk) or contact her directly on 07912 360779.