

Implementing a treatment coordinator in your practice

If your practice offers not just maintenance dental care, but also more aesthetic and elective dental options, then you could benefit from introducing a treatment coordinator into your practice. This article outlines the role of a treatment coordinator, and how this can improve a practice's case acceptance and patient relations.

The role of the treatment coordinator is an increasingly popular role within dental practices in the UK. This position is not a new way of thinking. Dentists all over the UK are aware of the role, but do not know how to introduce it successfully. This article provides an insight into how to introduce a treatment coordinator into your practice. Could you be the team member responsible for implementing this role—responsible for your own personal growth as well as that of your dental practice?

The treatment coordinator aims to remove 90% of non-clinical dentistry from the dentist, to provide a high level of customer service and to build excellent relationships with the patients. The role enables the treatment coordinator to engage with patients on a different level—in sharp contrast with the traditional way it has been done.

I worked in practice for 12 years. The role I enjoyed most was being a treatment coordinator. It is such a varied role. You meet new people daily. You help change the patient's perception of dentistry, and at the same time increase the uptake of treatment plans for dentists. This was the role that gave me the most job satisfaction. If you are looking for a new challenge in your practice, then this is often the most rewarding one you can have.

This role is now seen as a career move for dental nurses and front-desk team members.

As long as you have dental knowledge, then this role can act as a promotion for you. Once you have been promoted, there are further skills that you can learn to advance your career as a treatment coordinator. One example of advancing your career would be dental photography.

The advantage of having a dental nurse in the role is that they can help the practice in another way—by attaining a qualification in dental radiography as well



An experienced dental nurse with excellent communication skills, may consider a new role as treatment coordinator.

as gaining skills in photography.

So why do practices need to have a treatment coordinator?

Every dental practice needs new patients, and every dental practice needs to make sure that they can provide a good experience for their patients—ensuring that the patients choose them, and stay with them.

Every patient that chooses to come to your practice is expecting a service. It is of paramount importance that all new patients are dealt with in an efficient manner that provides solutions to their needs.

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Financial success. The most successful dental practices are the ones excelling at treatment plan fulfillment and creating long-term patients who return time and time again.

How many dentists in your practice lack confidence talking about money? There are three ways to measure this:

- Treatment plans are given to the patient at the front desk
- Treatment plans are posted
- The dentist talks about treatment options and then talks themselves out of treatment.

These options can be termed 'chucking money down the drain'. All the patient does when they see the fee is react to it. They complain at the front desk (and it is embarrassing) or they complain to their partner when they open the letter and put the treatment plan into a pile of paperwork that they will deal with 'one day'.

On the flip side, one major problem we have is that we talk too much to our patients. Instead of listening to them, we get them straight into the dental chair and begin assessing their teeth. After all, this is what dentists are trained to do. In dental school, there is little or no training on communication, customer service or dealing with money.

New business

New patients are new business. It is important for you to understand and remember that fact before you continue to read this article.

Now you know that new patients are new business, it is important to understand that anyone who deals with new business has a huge responsibility. And that responsibility is not to be underestimated.

So who is currently dealing with your new business?

Your front-desk team (who are always under pressure), and the dentists?

The reason we need a treatment coordinator is to take this responsibility away from the front desk and the dentists and to pass it onto someone else—in this case, a treatment coordinator; a person who has dedicated time and is trained to effectively deal with new business, ensuring that patients have their expectations met.

Once a practice has a treatment coordinator, there are several things that need to be tracked each month, such as how many new patients phone the practice and how many book an appointment. When these are measured, this is known as a conversion rate which we look at as a percentage. We also need to look at how many patients that have an assessment or consultation with the dentist actually book an appointment for treatment. One key performance indicator that we need to assess is the average spend of new patients each month.

When I ask practices how much the average new patient is worth to them, the common answer is £300–500 a month. When I work with a practice and properly assess this figure, the average is in fact around £1000.

If we lose five new patients on the phone each week, the practice has lost £260 000 a year. Although shocking, this is probably happening in your dental practice. What do you think your principal would do with that amount of money a year? I am sure this would be passed onto the team with training and salaries. This is an example of why the front-desk team have a huge responsibility with dealing with new business. If this responsibility could be passed over to a treatment coordinator, who has the time to talk to the new patient, this would really help the practice.

Now if five new patients were booked to see a dentist and only two of them went ahead per week, which is an average figure, then the practice has lost a further £156 000 a year.

As a dental nurse, I did not have any involvement in the business side and I was not aware of figures and what they meant. I think that times have changed, but these figures are real examples and dentists find it shocking to learn. I imagine when you are reading this, you are feeling the same as the dentists. What a waste of potential income and therefore growth of the practice that you work in.

So now imagine if in your practice:

- A new patient's call was answered and not put on hold

- Your front-desk team were too busy to deal with the new patient, but they had a dedicated person to deal with the new patient
- When the front-desk team do deal with a new patient, they can convert them easier as they can offer free appointments
- All new patients were seen by a treatment coordinator who built a relationship and added value to the practice
- You listened to your new patients and confirmed what they wanted
- You were confident talking about fees
- Patients had an idea of the fees before they booked in to see a dentist
- A dentist spent their appointment time just assessing the patient and not rushing in the last 5 minutes to do everything else
- The front desk did not have to deal with treatment plans and awkward comments
- Treatment plans were not posted and a patient had a free-of-charge meeting to discuss their options after their assessment.

This may sound impossible, but your practice can easily do this.

Who to choose as a treatment coordinator

A treatment coordinator can be a member of the dental team, be it a front-desk team member, practice manager or a dental nurse. Remember the dental nurse does have an advantage as they can gain a radiography qualification.

Certain qualities that a treatment coordinator needs are:

- To be a team player
- To work well on their own
- To be efficient
- To be a people person.

Communication skills and customer services skills can be taught to give you confidence. However, the main quality that a treatment coordinator needs is to have a friendly, bubbly personality—a personality that people warm to.

How to introduce this role into your practice

Step one

Confirm who is going to be the treatment coordinator and who is going to be the back up. Ideally, two people are needed to carry out this role to allow the main treatment coordinator to have holidays.

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Step two

Confirm where the treatment coordinator will see new patients. The ideal is to have a consultation room which is solely used by the treatment coordinator. Some practices do not have this facility, so they use the practice's office, a spare treatment room, or a local coffee shop.

This room needs to be free from clutter and have a nice ambience about it too—a home from home.

Step three

Organization of the treatment coordinator's diary. As a treatment coordinator, you will have your own diary and new patients will be booked in to see you at a scheduled time. Many practices begin using a treatment coordinator on a two-day-a-week basis and increase this to full time as the role progresses.

The treatment coordinator will be seeing patients for new patient consultations and treatment options appointments—this latter appointment will coincide with an appointment with the dentist.

You need to decide what appointments a treatment coordinator will be seeing new patients for. Cosmetics, implants and whitening are the norm—but seeing nervous patients for them to meet the team and get a feel for the practice in a non-clinical environment is a good idea.

When the treatment coordinator sees a new patient for a consultation, the patient does not have an appointment scheduled to see the dentist at that stage. Only once the new patient has decided that they want to know if they are suitable for the treatment options does the treatment coordinator schedule an appointment with the dentist.

Step four Training

To be an effective treatment coordinator, you need to have training. Treatment coordinators that do not have training, fall into the trap of recommending treatment to patients; this should not be done. A treatment coordinator should be talking for 20–25% of the conversation, and not talking clinically. This



The treatment coordinator is responsible for having a conversation with the patient and showing them the treatments the practice has to offer.

appointment is about building relationships with patients and informing them of the solutions that the practice provides to solve their problems.

Communication skills, as well as implementing effective systems, do not come naturally. You must be trained in these areas.

Step five

Begin your new career in dentistry as a treatment coordinator.

The day-to-day breakdown of a treatment coordinator's work

1. A treatment coordinator sees all the new patients in the practice for a free, initial consultation
2. The treatment coordinator holds the consultation with the new patient
3. The main aim during the consultation is for the treatment coordinator to build a relationship with

the new patient

4. The treatment coordinator will demonstrate to the patient the practice's professionalism and excellent customer service
5. The treatment coordinator does not recommend treatment to the new patient, nor do they become involved in a clinical consultation. The treatment coordinator is simply having a conversation and showing the new patient the treatments the practice has to offer
6. If the new patient wishes to know their suitability for the treatment options available, then the treatment coordinator will schedule them an assessment appointment with the dentist
7. All appointments scheduled, and payments that are collected, are ideally taken in the consultation room.

When the patient returns for their appointment to see the dentist

1. If trained and qualified, at the assessment appointment the treatment coordinator will take a full series of photographs and prescribed radiographs for the dentist
2. Once the dentist has completed an assessment, the treatment coordinator will assist the dentist with entering all treatment options onto the software, collate all consents required and estimates for all treatment
3. The dentist then explains the treatment options to the new patient
4. The treatment coordinator then stays with the new patient, schedules required appointments and organizes the financial arrangement—all of this away from the reception area of your practice, creating a pleasant, non-intrusive and private environment for the new patient.

Responsibilities of a treatment coordinator

- Providing outstanding customer service at all times
- Following practice systems
- Being a team player
- Leading the team to ensure the patient has a pleasant experience
- Providing the initial consultation for the practice
- Scheduling and booking of new patient appointments
- Confirming financial arrangements
- Processing credit applications
- Diary productivity
- Assisting the dentist by placing treatment plans and

gathering consents and estimates

- Assisting the patient with any queries they may have about treatment
- Ensuring each time the patient attends they have a positive experience
- Tracking of performance indicators
- Ensuring all treatment coordinator systems are followed to the letter
- Weekly review of activity and new patients with dentists
- Feedback to the dentists
- Identifying when further training for other team members is required.

How much should a treatment coordinator earn?

This is a hard question to answer. As always, a wage depends on where you live, but this job comes with a huge amount of responsibility. Treatment coordinators in London do earn more than in other geographical areas. However, I always encourage a bonus system for the entire team—and for the treatment coordinator as

a minimum. Performance-related pay is essential in today's environment.

Conclusion

Becoming a treatment coordinator is a rewarding career move for any member of the dental team. The role creates an outstanding experience for the patient with the customer service that you will provide. The dentists, the team and the practice benefit immensely.

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KEY POINTS

- Choosing the right person for the role is essential.
- Systems must be implemented to ensure success and consistency.
- A treatment coordinator must be trained in this role.
- As well as having a good relationship with the dentists they work for, treatment coordinators must believe in the practice and the skill set of the dentists.

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