

Using your senses

Laura Horton explains how to be the new patient's only choice, ensure you keep the patient and get referrals, all by just using your senses



I work alongside numerous dental practices to ensure that the skills owned by their team are second to none. For the practices involved this results in an increased number of new patients booking an appointment when they enquire about the practice, therefore increasing the conversion rates of new patient telephone enquiries.

This article stresses the importance of getting it right the first time.

The key factor

The patient's experience of the practice is the key factor in ensuring the patients choose you, stay with you and recommend family and friends.

If you are unsure that your marketing is working, if you're concerned your team are not handling your new patient enquiries in the best possible way or if you wish to change your patient experience of the practice then read on!

Where do you advertise? Does it work? Is your phone ringing?

The most common concerns I hear from principals is the need to improve their conversion rates; whether this is from a new patient enquiry, or a new patient consultation.

The media has brought to the attention of your patients not only the need-based dentistry that they can achieve, also the fact that they can choose their dentist. A patient does not have to go to the nearest practice; they can make the choice to go where they please. All of the practices that I have trained prior to the training reported that patients were 'shopping around'; by this they mean ringing a list of practices to find exactly what it is their looking for. This means every conversion is paramount to your business success, especially in the current climate.

It is important that when new patients telephone your practice that they choose to book an appointment there and then.

Answer this question: When a new patient says they will call back or think it over – do you honestly expect them to ring back? What is there to think over? The patient has already made up

their mind. That's why they have not booked an appointment!

Fact: When the phone call has ended and the patient has not booked an appointment you have lost that patient. There is a 1% chance they will call back and book an appointment.

Fact: If every new patient that came to your practice had treatment to an average fee of £500, and every day you lost one patient (i.e. a new patient enquired but did not book an appointment) that is average revenue of £130,000 your practice is losing a year. Can you afford not to give your practice a shake? You must make sure the goal of every new patient telephone enquiry is a scheduled consultation. If you do so, you will see your revenue increase dramatically!

The phone call

The phone call is the patient's first impression of your practice and the experience they will receive.

The phone call must be a structured system with several aspects; the greeting must be chosen and the receptionist must be in control of the conversation. Ask the patient my nine magic questions to allow you to communicate with the patient on an emotional basis rather than a factual one. This process allows you to discover the patients dominant buying motive (pain, wants look improve the appearance, wants to replace a missing tooth) and then also establish a future motivating event (free from pain so they can carry on day to day life with no interruptions, will become more confident, will be able to eat without embarrassment). Value will be perceived and you will be able to schedule an appointment.

Creating your new patient experience

The way to start your overhaul is to open up your senses. Open your imagination to your five senses:

- Hear
- Sight
- Smell
- Taste
- Touch/feel.

Take an opportunity to brainstorm and imagine yourself as the new patient and relate the experience you would wish to have to all five senses, for example:

- Hear – would you want to hear a happy, friendly person on the phone when you first contact the practice?
- Sight – Would you prefer to see a clean, crisp, uncluttered reception area or a messy waiting room with crumpled newspapers and damaged magazines?
- Smell – Ask a patient that you have a good relationship with how they find the aroma in your practice? What would you like to smell when you walk into a professional establishment besides that typical dental smell?
- Taste – Is water the only refreshment available for your patients? Have you chosen the best tasting mouthwash for your surgery?
- Touch/feel – How do you guarantee your patient won't feel any pain from your injections? What textures are they feeling in your bathroom? Quality hands towels or cheap toilet paper?

Write a sense on the top of a piece of paper so you end up with five pieces of paper and over a period of two weeks regularly brainstorm each sense for you to be able to get a good idea of how you would like to experience your practice.

Communication is key

How do you rate your communication? By communication I do not mean how well you can explain a root canal filling! How would you rate your listening skills and body language? How do you rate you team's communication skills?

Communication skills are not a set of skills we are born with. Some of us are good at communication, some of us are natural people persons, yet still that does not help the other 90% of us trying hard but getting nowhere. I always invite every member of the dental team to ask each other how they rate each other's communication skills (in a constructive way). This can give you a great insight to your personality 'style' and help

understand the perception your patients have of you.

As business owners you should now be all too aware that an unfriendly, stern receptionist who barks at your patients is not doing your reputation any good. Patients want a kind, friendly smiling person to greet them, just as they want a dentist who really does care.

So how do patients know their dentist really does care? The following points are some ways a patient will know you care, and they will choose you time and time again to be their dental team, and recommend their friends to you:

- Body language – the dentist makes eye contact, smiles and appears relaxed
- Tone of voice – is not over bearing or standoffish – very calm and gentle
- Other relationships – the dentist talks to his nurse in a pleasant manner (his manners are not just for show)
- Listening – he/she doesn't 'tell' the patient, the dentist asks the patient questions and listens to the patients answers
- Builds relationships – asks questions and truly wants to know the answer, not just making small talk!

Conclusion

There are simple steps we can all take to improve our relationships whether they are with loved ones or business clients. The same applies to the first impressions that we allow others to perceive of us.

Making the first steps to changing your new patient experience can be daunting. However, once the system is in place, you will find there is nothing more rewarding than working in an environment that you and your dental team enjoy. That enjoyment will translate immediately into a positive new patient experience. [PD](#)

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Laura Horton travels throughout the UK bringing her programmes direct to your entire dental team. The various training Laura Horton Consulting provides is bespoke programs to suit your practice goals and vision. All training provided is in-house and CPD verifiable. For further information contact 07912 360779, laura@laurahortonconsulting.co.uk or visit the website at www.laurahortonconsulting.co.uk.