

Understanding the role of treatment coordinator

Laura Horton explains the various ways in which a treatment coordinator (TCO) can pave the way for greater communication for dental teams

Ask anyone how problems occur in business – the answer is always lack of communication.

Having a TCO can be a unique selling point (USP) for your business – and the unique thing about TCOs is that they have more time than you can imagine to spend with your patients at no cost to the clinician.

TCOs ideally need to see your patients in a non-clinical environment, an environment where patients can relax without the ‘normal’ associations of a dental practice. In this environment your TCO can listen to your patients and encourage them to talk freely – often this is a first for patients in a dental practice.

In this article I will explain the ways that a TCO can learn about your patient and pass this information over to the dental team.

The patient’s goals

When a patient is asked ‘what can I do for you?’ or ‘how can I help?’ they tend to respond with their short-term visualisation – ‘I need my front tooth fixed’ or ‘I’m here for an exam, but I need you to look at this stain on my teeth’.

TCOs can talk to your patients about their long-term goals



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– where would they like to see themselves? Is this broken front tooth the only problem? What else would the patient like to improve about the anterior teeth?

This is where a broken tooth turns into a makeover – you solve the problems that the patient has owned for a long time, but you never knew about before.

Motivating factors

What’s prompted the patient to come to you right now? Is there a special occasion, has a child said something to upset the patient, has the patient seen an unflattering photograph, or have they become financially independent?

How many times have you asked Mrs Smith about improving the colour of her teeth and she’s said ‘what do I need to do that for?’ Yet now she has decided that she would like to improve the aesthetics of her teeth. Perhaps she has Googled teeth whitening and even gone to another clinician.

When I was a TCO and I asked patients what prompted them to come to us now, nine times out of 10 they would respond with one of the above motivating factors. When I asked if they had a dentist, they would often say yes but then add that they didn’t do the treatment they wanted or they had never listened to them.

Different strokes

Each and every patient is different – you know that. So why is every patient treated the same?

Every patient falls into a different personality group, and each group needs to be communicated to differently. If they have a dominant personality, they want to be treated quickly, efficiently, without long-winded explanations and

Practice organisation

they like you to 'wrap it up' – think of them as the Lord Sugars of the world.

Other people's personalities are results-orientated. They wish to know what the outcome will be. How good will they

I don't know why this is, but I am sure it's something to do with dentists belonging to a high-creed profession – whether it's your patients or your team, no one wants to look silly in front of them.

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look? How will this make them feel? Yet the majority of dentists talk to patients on a technical/factual level, and this doesn't suit every patient.

Remember, as much as it might hurt to think this way, people buy from people they like and your patients are buying from you. But for patients to like you, they need know that you understand them. TCOs can tell you how to effectively communicate with your patient, thereby making the transition from you understanding them to them buying from you that much smoother.

Handing over

If you have a TCO, they can learn masses of valuable information about your patient for you. Your TCO can introduce you to the patient, explain all about them and their requirements from you, the clinician, and provide you with valuable social history, which allows you to start with relationship-building right from the start.

No such thing as a stupid question

During my time as a TCO, at the end of a treatment presentation when the dentist had left the room, I used to ask the patient one question: 'I know you didn't have any more questions for Dr Parmar, but do you have any for me?'

More often than not, the response was: 'Well, I do have one question, but I hope you don't think it's silly.'

No matter how lovely you are as a clinician, patients can (and often will) feel silly for wanting to ask something. When I have implemented the role of the TCO into dental businesses, one of my promises is that I am there to provide support for the team as long as I am breathing. Whenever I get a call from a TCO, practice manager or team member it always starts the same way: 'Laura, I'm sure this is a silly question but...'

I used to spend a good five minutes talking to our patients and answering 'silly' questions, which were, in fact, perfectly reasonable questions. Left unanswered, though, they would not have gone ahead with treatment.

Point of contact

Part of the TCO's USP is that they are the one point of contact for your patients before, during and after their treatment. The patients have access to the TCO via their practice email, direct line, or practice mobile – in fact, many patients like to text the TCO. Any last minute questions the patient has about treatment, or instructions that have been muddled, they can contact the TCO. TCOs are there to reassure your patient and then pass this information over to you so that you are fully aware of their concerns.

Customer service

The role of the TCO is the driving force for many positive changes in your dental practice, and trained properly, the TCO role can deliver outstanding customer service that really sets your practice apart from your competition and changes your patients' perception of dentistry.

The initial consultations that a TCO provides are just part of the story. TCOs are team leaders that push the entire team to 'wow' the patient on every visit. Have you ever experienced a great service at the beginning of a purchase, yet as soon the transaction is completed you feel like the forgotten customer?

TCOs are responsible for the patient's experience every visit. This means the patient's needs are communicated to each and every team member at every instance. They are also the ideal person to lead a morning huddle to provide feedback about the previous day to the team, as well as the needs of the patients for the day ahead. PD