

DELIVERING PREMIUM PRACTICE

THE NURSE'S PERSPECTIVE

Dental nurses do more than just hold the suction hose. They meet a patient's every need to ensure their experience is positive. In part one of this two-part feature, Laura Horton describes how a good nurse will prepare a patient for treatment



At a recent one-day programme, I was working with 15 dentist delegates on improving their communication skills. As part of the session, I asked them: 'What do you think your patients' perception is of your dental nurse?' The room fell silent. A few looked at this floor; a few looked at me and smiled. I encouraged them to give me an honest answer, and the honest results were not positive.

All agreed that their patients believed their dental nurse to lack customer service skills, and that they weren't particularly important, and just sat in the background. Only one said their nurse was absolutely fantastic and that

the patients absolutely loved her - only one. Things weren't looking good.

JOB SATISFACTION

When I started working as a dental nurse in 1996, I was very proud of my job. Although, when people asked me what I did for living, the comments I received were nothing short of negative, with many retorting: 'Are you that person who sits holding the suction?'

All of us in the profession know we do so much more than just sit and hold the suction. It's important in premium practice that the dental nurse is seen as a valuable member of the team.

I always say people should be encouraged to do what they're best at. In the practice, this means that the dentists should carry out the dentistry; while the nurses should be in control of the organisation of the dental surgery, and responsible for the patient's experience while they're with them. This works, especially as dental nurses are often extremely caring, loyal individuals.

Ask yourself: 'Who's the best person to control your patients' experiences of treatment at your practice?' It's quite simply, your nurse.

Dentists should be doing dentistry, while nurses should be left to care and control the treatment room.

GETTING TOGETHER

To maintain team strength, every practice should have a meeting each morning (see '10 reasons to... have a morning meeting', PPD February issue). This is an opportunity to discuss the clinicians' day. The dental nurse

should lead, and inform the team about every single patient that's coming in to see them that day. Their wants, their needs, their dislikes, how we can make them happy, and what is it they really want from us, because your nurses should know your patients better than anybody.



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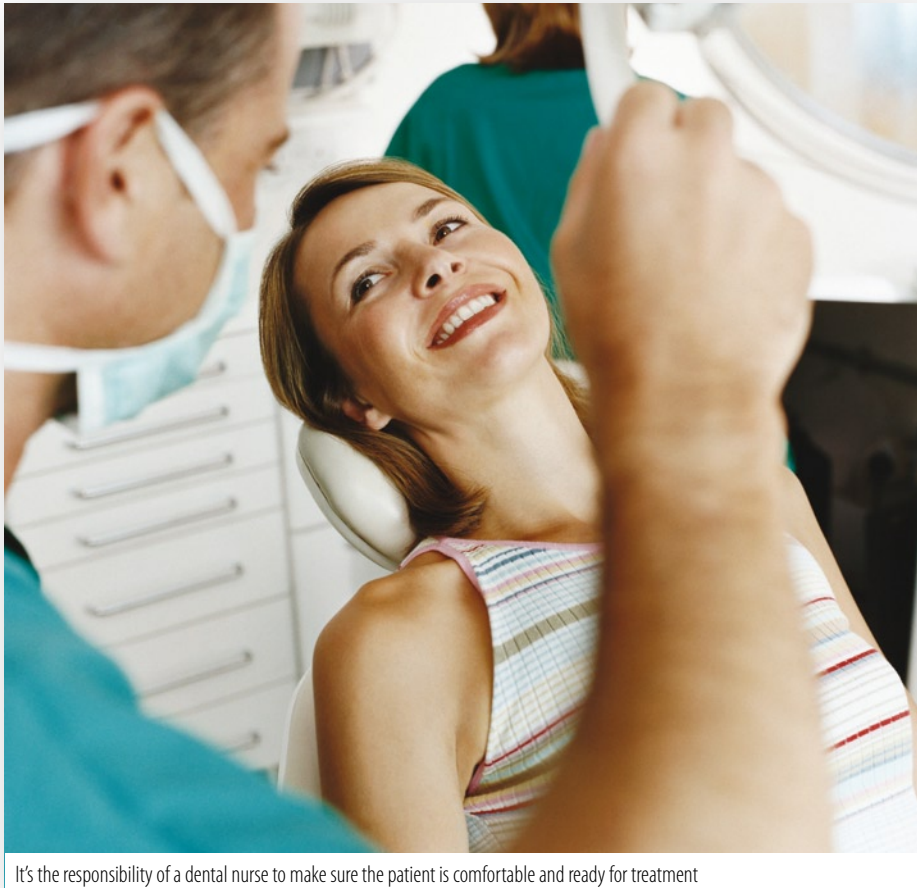
FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

When your patients come in to your practice, how are they brought into your treatment room? The nurse should collect your patients from your patient lounge, introduce herself, and take them to the treatment room.

The room should be already set up, so the nurse can provide the patient with their full attention.

In every premium practice, the patient should at least be able to choose the music they want to listen to, yet this is a basic thing

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It's the responsibility of a dental nurse to make sure the patient is comfortable and ready for treatment

back, and before the patient is given the bib and the glasses. One of the nurse's other responsibilities is to make sure the patient is comfortable. If you're in the surgery for a while, a patient does not want to end up with a soaking wet face or water running down their neck, so remember to put bibs on your patients to protect their clothes.

SHOW CONCERN FOR WELLBEING

Prior to popping the chair back, the nurse must also check how the patient is feeling that day. If they are having a cosmetic treatment or anything that's going to enhance their appearance in the long term, it's important that the nurse creates excitement. This is a golden opportunity for the patient to ask any questions or inform you of anything that might be worrying them about that day's treatment. If the patient is relaxed before you start, you know it's going to be so much easier to treat them, so this one-to-one time with the nurse is essential. Once the patient is ready, this is the time to call the dentist into the treatment room.

Next month: Laura Horton offers some tips on looking after the patient, once they are in the chair and ready for treatment.

that many practices still don't offer. And if you want to offer the best, you need to provide the patient with the services that they want.

If your practice adopts this system, the music would be on when the nurse takes the patient into the treatment room. If it's not what they want, it's important to reiterate to the patient you are caring about them and you are prepared and ready for them. It makes them feel really special.

KNOW YOUR PATIENT

I am a keen fan of collecting social history information on your patients. The nurses have the unique opportunity to do this. We all need to know as much as we can about our patients and really take things to the next level. Small talk is really not appropriate, but the dental nurse's role should really be about building a relationship and gathering social history information on the patient and recording it in your dental software, so the entire team

gets to know everything they can about the patient; holidays, family life, and so on.

Throughout any treatment, I have a golden rule that at least every 15 minutes, the patient must have their name used and they must be asked how they are, if they are comfortable, would their music changed. The golden rule to building relationships with your patients and showing that you care, is to use their name. Five times every 15 minutes by your nurse is not too much; it's just right.

THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

The nurse then needs to check the temperature of the room and ensure the patient is nice and comfortable when seated in the chair. Do you have neck support cushions for patients? Do you have heated neck cushions that patients might like? Is the room too cold for the patient? Would they prefer a blanket? It's essential to check all of these things before we pop the chair

KEY POINTS
Introduce yourself to the patient
Give the patient your full attention
Call them by their name
Make sure the patient is comfortable
Show concern for their wellbeing
Speak positively about their treatment to relax them

To ask a question or comment on this article please send an email to: comments@ppdentistry.com

