

Getting to know you

Getting to know all about you

Laura Horton explains the importance of understanding your patients' reasons for treatment

The way your new patient phone call is handled is essential to your success in practice, so why is it that so many are not turning their new patient call into a positive experience that a patient will not forget?

Do you want new patients contacting you to know that you offer just the

dentistry they are enquiring about, or dentistry that is delivered with a fantastic service?

All consumers now want a service; they want to feel cared for and understood. When a new patient (NP) contacts your practice and asks: 'How much is...?' – is it the price that they are really concerned about?

'Of course,' I hear you shout. 'That's what they have asked for!' I know from years of experience that the price is not always what the NP is interested in – they ask as they do not know what to say when your team answer the phone.

The patient calling has not woken up on the morning of the phone call and looked in the mirror to suddenly see that their teeth have changed from B1 to A3.5. The change in colour has been occurring over a period of time and the reason that they have now called you is due to a motivating factor.

For example, the caller may need whiter teeth to restore confidence.

The motivating factor: an event that has just been booked, a photograph they have just seen and were not pleased with, etc.

Understand patients' needs

So, why is it that 99% of dental practices do not look into the needs and motivating factors of the caller?

When dealing with NPs on the phone, you really need to look behind their initial question and discover their need and motivating factor by asking an open ended question such as: 'We can definitely help you; can you tell me more about why you would like tooth whitening?'

This leads the NP to open up and tell you about their event that is pending and they are shocked because of the photograph they have just seen. They are likely to tell you how they feel – maybe self-conscious when they smile or

nervous about how they will look at the event.

The conversation technique

As well as discovering the patients' needs and motivating factors, it is important to engage with patients on an emotional rather than factual level.

Dentistry is far too factual and many members of the dental team are used to hearing dentists talking factually to patients, so they focus on speaking the same way to patients on the phone.

If you want your patients to see that you offer dentistry delivered with a fantastic service, then you must change the phone call from this:

NP: 'How much is tooth whitening?'

Receptionist: '£300 for the home whitening where we make trays and give you a gel to use at home, or £550 for in-surgery where you have whiter teeth in 90 minutes.'

NP: 'OK, that's lovely, thank you.' End of call.

Why not try this:

NP: 'How much is tooth whitening?'

Receptionist: 'I can definitely help you with that.' (Then exchange of names.)

'Can you tell me more about why you would like tooth whitening?'

NP: 'Yes, I saw a photo at the weekend and couldn't believe how yellow my teeth were compared to other pictures taken two or three years ago. I was so shocked to see the colour change and I have my wedding in six months.'

Straight away the receptionist taking the call is connecting with the NP emotionally compared to the first example, where the communication is factual.

In the first example, those people who are dealt with in that way and do not convert are then described as shoppers.

Revealing your value

I do not believe in shoppers – there is no such thing. People either see the value in you and like what you offer, or they don't. Those who do not see the value in you or like what you offer will not book an appointment with you.

Stephen Covey says: 'Be interested, not interesting.' It is a motto that should be applied to every NP phone call to ensure you show in your conversation that you do care for the patients' needs and also have the solution to help them. **D**



Laura Horton has worked in dentistry for more than 15 years and is passionate about treatment coordination, business and team development. In 2008 Laura left her full-time practice management role and began working with dental practices to

help them successfully reach their true potential. To find out more about Laura, visit www.horton-consulting.com.

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