Reaching new heights

Laura Horton presents 10 reasons why implementing a follow-up system can keep you head and shoulders above the competition

An effective follow-up system can help improve customer satisfaction, as it shows you are taking an interest in the wellbeing of the patient. In addition, it helps you reach your financial goals.

There are various different ways, reasons and types of following up that you need to do in your dental business.

1. Make your fortune

Your fortune is in your follow-up. It measures your level of success, so you need to make sure you offer patients the opportunity to ask questions. Having an effective follow-up system can help you reach your financial goals for the practice.

2. Let the patient decide

Some patients, when given a treatment plan, really do have to go away and think about things.

The conscientious type need to go home, discuss with their partner, friends and family, research on the internet, and make sure that the treatment plan they have been provided is right for them. They also need the opportunity to ask you more questions.

3. Time for questions

At the appointment itself, there is often a case of information overload, which can confuse patients. Asking a team member to follow up gives the patient an opportunity to ask any questions and lay things out clearly in their mind.

4. Treatment uptake

Following up with your patients increases treatment uptake. Once you do this, it will reduce your outstanding treatment figure.

A number of years ago, I worked in a practice where all patients were given treatment plans, but their cards used to sit in a drawer in our treatment room. The system in the practice was simply to do nothing until the drawer was so full that we couldn't get anymore cards in. At that point I then had to go through the drawer and anyone who had not gone ahead with their treatment in the last three months was passed to the practice manager, and that was it. No following up. No chasing.

Following up patients effectively increases your treatment acceptance, the speed of uptake and the financial figure at the end of your treatment report.

5. A welcome pack

When a new patient contacts the practice and does not book an appointment, it is essential that a welcome pack is still sent to them. If you are doing this already, fantastic, but do not miss out on the opportunity to follow up with a phone call to make sure they received the brochure and to see if they have any questions that they would like to ask you.

6. Routine calls

When you do your three-monthly and your six-monthly recalls by letter or SMS, these people need to be followed up with a phone call afterwards if you want to increase the number of patients that are booked into your diary.

7. Same-day call

Patients who have had complex treatments, or treatments where they may be in some discomfort afterwards, should always be contacted and followed up.

In a premium practice, the dentist should be doing this on the same day the treatment took place. Waiting until the next day is no good. If you really want to enhance your level of customer satisfaction, you need to follow up with your patient that day.

8. Patient survey

Following up with your patients to see how their experience has been brings great customer satisfaction.

If you have a new hygienist or dentist working in the practice, an ideal opportunity to get the patient's feedback is after their appointment. However, it is best not to ask when they are still in the building: ask after they have left the practice. Ring them and see how they found the experience, and get some real positive (or even negative) feedback that you can use constructively.

9. Dormant patients

In your practice, you should have a follow-up system to reactivate dormant patients. It may well be that these patients have not gone to another dentist, so it is important to have a follow-up system in place where you 'reactivate' these patients.

10. The final call

The final follow-up is at the end of a course of treatment. You are the ideal person for this follow up so you can let them know it was a pleasure to treat them.

At the same time, why not ask them for a referral?

A friendly voice

A member of the team who knows the patient best should always complete follow-ups. There are companies that you can employ to do this for you, but this method will not portray the personalised and caring service you want to get across.

Implementing an efficient follow-up system, as well as utilising effective communication skills, makes your patients feel that they are receiving the best care possible, and puts you head and shoulders above the competition. PD

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