him with questions," Mary says. Dr. Smith, meanwhile, is befuddled when patients don’t accept recommended treatment. Yet he gives little thought to the manner in which he and his team build, or erode, the foundation upon which successful treatment acceptance is based.

In Mary’s case, Dr. Smith doesn’t realize that he is undermining Mary’s trust in his care. Mary will be far less likely to proceed with recommended treatment because Dr. Smith has created the impression that he is always in a hurry to get to the next patient, which makes her feel uneasy and unimportant. Worse yet, Mary is interested in a certain procedure but doesn’t even feel comfortable asking about it.

It’s a matter of trust

Certainly, patients trust you enough to come in for routine appointments. But when the patient needs or wants care that goes beyond “routine” procedures, have you and your team instilled in the patient the confidence, the dental education and the necessary trust in you and your practice overall for him or her to accept the treatment recommended? In some cases, patients are motivated to pursue treatment merely because they seldom question recommendations from their health care providers. But those patients are growing fewer and farther between each year.

Most patients today base major decisions, such as extensive dental treatment, on multiple factors: full comprehension of the need for treatment; the importance of the procedure to them in terms of quality of life, esthetics or health; possible ramifications if they choose to procrastinate or elect an alternative procedure; and how they feel about the practice as a whole.

Recommendation acceptance

When it comes to treatment presentation, we find that most dentists and teams understand the fundamentals of the concept, but they forget that patients base their recommendation acceptance on multiple factors.

In addition to always treating every patient as if she or he is the most important person in the room with you, and always taking the time to solicit questions from the patient, consider a few other ways in which you build trust with every patient and at every opportunity.

Be candid. Most patients are aware of some general risks in treatment so they are waiting for you to be frank about what, if anything, they might be faced with as a result of the treatment. If they are given advantages and disadvantages, research shows that patients are more willing to trust you to deliver their care. Patients always feel better when they know the benefits and risks of proposed treatment.

Always speak at the patients’ level of understanding. Jargon and “$10 words” can confuse patients and make them uncomfortable because they don’t understand, but they likely won’t ask you what you mean.

Exhibit clear confidence in your recommended course of treatment. A personal testimonial about recent treatment for another patient and the results obtained, for example, underscores that sense of security. It demonstrates that you have no doubt that you will get a good result for this patient.

Be aware of the perception of “fairness.” Many issues having to do with trust are linked to the patients’ perception of the value they are receiving. Studies show that patients avoid dental treatment due to cost more than pain. Yet, if they feel that the costs measure up to the service received, there is no complaint. Many patients will not question fees if the practice has demonstrated that they can deliver superior service.

From the first phone call to dismissal, consistently demonstrate the “value” for services that the patient is receiving.

Many patients today expect more than just a routine visit. They are smart, savvy and are much more aware of recent advances in dental care and treatment options than patients 20 years ago. Numerous patients would love to change something about their smile or improve their oral health, but few will verbalize those desires without prompting. Others have concerns, but don’t want to appear foolish in raising them. Yet, if new and existing patients feel that the dentist and dental team are sincerely interested in their needs, wants and concerns, they are far more likely to be open to the treatment recommended.

Encouraging acceptance

Follow these steps to set the tone for patient treatment acceptance.

• Create a comfortable, non-rushed environment when explaining treatment. Don’t have the schedule booked so tight that you are perceived as being in a rush.

Patients need to feel that they are important

Don’t make the patient feel that his mouth is a ‘mess’

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Sally McKenzie is CEO of McKenzie Management, which provides success-proven management solutions to dentistry nationwide. She is also editor of The Dentist’s Network Newsletter, www.thedentistsnetwork.net; the e-Management Newsletter from www.mckenziemgmt.com; and The New Dentist™ magazine, www.thenewdentist.net. She can be reached at (877) 777.6151 or sallymck@mckenziemgmt.com.

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