A rewarding outcome

Choosing your learning style and needs is important, says Glenys Bridges, to ensure you get a good return on your investment.

Over the recent months, professional development for all members of the dental team has become a burning issue. In response to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) requirements for registered Dental Care Professionals (DCPs), a wide range of learning pathways have been introduced, leading to both core general CPD. To make sure your time and money are well spent, you must choose the learning resources best suited to your learning style and needs.

Over recent years, the internet has become a popular education medium, mostly because it offers the flexibility essential for students running a full-time job alongside academic studies. Internet learning works very well for students who are confident in their IT skills, although this type of learning provides an opportunity to develop computer skills for those who have not previously needed them.

What is your style? Once the necessary IT skills are in place, it is a good idea to build learning styles analysis into your Personal Development Plan (PDP). When you know how you learn best, you will be able to make informed choices when selecting learning opportunities. Some good training companies offer a learning styles analysis test so they can advise students on how to organise their studies to maximise their learning.

Since September 2009, each student enrolling for our courses are asked to complete a learning styles questionnaire. On receipt of their answers DRC provides students with details of their individual learning style and a tuition package formulated to meet their needs. The basis of analysis we have chosen for our students identifies their VARK preferences. That is the extent to which the retain information provided through Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic media. Some people find that their preferred learning style may be a blend of two or more styles, whereas some people have a one very strong preference.

Visual learners have a preference for seeing or observed things, when learning they like to see pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, flip-chart, etc. These people will use phrases such as ‘show me’, ‘let’s have a look at that’ and will be best able to perform a new task after reading the instructions or watching someone else do it first. These people like the back-up of working from workbooks, lists and written directions and instructions.

Auditory learners have a preference for learning through listening; to the spoken word, of self or others, of sounds and noises. These people will use phrases such as ‘tell me’, ‘let’s talk it over’ and will be best able to perform a new task after listening to instructions from an expert. These are the people who have been given verbal instructions over the telephone, and can remember all the words to songs that they hear!

Kinaesthetic learners learn best from experiences such as touching, feeling, holding, doing, and practical hands-on experiences. These people will use phrases such as ‘let me try’, ‘how do you feel?’ and will be best able to perform a new task by going ahead and trying it out, learning as they go. These are the people who like to experiment; they often lack the patience to carefully read instructions before things out.

The Dental Resource Company offers reader of Dental Tribune the chance to complete a learning-styles diagnostic free of charge to find out details of the learning opportunities best suited to you. For your free questionnaire, please email Claire@dental-resource.com; quoting ‘Dental Tribune learning styles diagnostic’ and we will send you one.

Building bridges between specialist & referrers

The receptionist at a specialist dental practice, says Beverly Street, plays a vital role in boosting and maintaining relationships between specialists and referring practices.

As more practices refer their patients to specialists, the regular duties of the receptionist have become more complex and demanding. For example, while everyday duties such as the efficient time management of appointments, stock control, ordering supplies and greeting patients and meeting their requests need to be executed to a high standard, the specialist dental receptionist must be responsible for other things.

Making the call
Greater emphasis is now placed on the specialist receptionist to make accurate judgement calls in regard to the type of appointment that the patient will require. Determining an urgent case that will need active treatment as opposed to a patient that requires a consultation must be distinguished in order to correctly schedule appointments, ensuring maximum workflow and of course, patient comfort and care.

Other duties that are often required by today’s specialist dental receptionist can involve marketing the practice to other dentists and consumers, gathering and successfully relaying treatment information to patients and operating and understating modern software systems such as electronic appointment scheduling, electronic ordering and updating websites and online activities including blogging.

A sympathetic ear
As specialist procedures such as Root Canal Treatment (RCT) is often associated with a painful trip to the dentist by many people, the stories that surround RCT are normally of an incredibly horrific nature but also, quite dated and out of step with modern practice. Patients don’t know what to expect and will often need a sympathetic ear to help answer questions such as:

• Will it hurt?
• How long will it take?
• How many appointments will I need?
• What is the endodontist like?
• Is he/she gentle?
• How much will it cost?

It is up to the specialist dental receptionist to answer these questions and provide comfort to the patient without judgement.

After the treatment
Aftercare is also an important role for the specialist receptionist. Quickly dealing with any problems that may arise after surgery is of course standard practice but calling to check a patient’s recovery or just to check in with the dentist to discuss treatments is always a good way to grow a trusting relationship.

As part of our aftercare service at Endocare, we also schedule an appointment for our patients to come back in six months. This appointment is at no cost to the patient and it gives us the chance to check on the treatment and chat with the patient about their recovery.

As an endodontic practice, the most important thing that we can do for our patients is deliver outstanding successful treatment that combines a level of customer care that is exceptional. This begins and ends with the endodontic receptionist.

‘The regular duties of the receptionist have become more complex and demanding.’

Many specialist dental practices work closely with referring dentists and very much become part of their team. The relationships that are built between specialist and referring dentists are crucial to not only patient care, but also the future growth of the specialist practice.

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