Making first contact

From the very first call that a patient makes to your practice, the team at reception should be word perfect in their greeting and continue with a professional tone of voice, questioning, to glean information about the person’s needs and requirements. This will allow the correct appointment slot to be booked, and will also ensure that the customer feels they are already receiving first-class treatment. All calls should be logged onto a basic form which should not only include the patient’s name, but also where they heard about the practice, who answered their call and whether or not they went ahead and booked an appointment.

By knowing whether the person making an appointment, you can begin to understand if your team enjoys a high success rate of converting new callers into booked appointments. Ideally you should be looking to achieve at least an 80 per cent conversion rate.

You will also be able to see which members of the team require additional training and support. Should a team member’s conversion rates differ greatly from other receptionists, you will be able to focus on improving their skills.

By knowing how patients heard about your practice, you will also be able to refine your marketing strategies and measure your return on investment. This will ensure that money is not spent in areas that generate little or no patient contact for the practice.

If you follow this tracking all the way through the patient’s treatment journey, you will be able to establish exactly what your marketing or advertising investment brought to the business in terms of revenue.

Before the first visit

If you stock patient welcome packs, the reception team should send one out whenever a patient books an appointment. A medical questionnaire and a smile analysis should be included.

‘From the very first call that a patient makes to your practice, the team at reception should be word perfect in their greeting’

At the first visit

Once the patient arrives at the practice, the reception team should ensure that the patient feels welcome and confident. Communication skills and positive body language are vitally important when a patient visits the practice for the first time, and your team members will have to take individual responsibility for creating that first impression.

At this time the front desk staff should check the patient’s completed documents, and take them through to the relevant dentist so that any areas raised on the smile questionnaire can be reviewed prior to the patient being brought to the surgery. This ensures that the patient’s requirements are met, and also means that the dentist will have the knowledge of the patient’s concerns and needs, which shows that the practice is efficiently run and customer-focused.

Cancellations and FTAs

Every month there is a certain amount of time wasted in practice by patients either failing to attend appointments or cancelling at short notice. Both of these can have a huge impact on the revenue of a practice when the cost is added up.

Your reception team can make a real difference in both these areas by using the correct verbal techniques when the patient makes an appointment. Letting the patient know in the right way that a certain amount of notice is required should cancelation be necessary, and that FTAs will incur an imposed penalty. This reduces missed appointments.

Should a patient try and cancel an appointment at short notice then use the effective communication techniques can, in many cases, result in that patient in fact attending for treatment, thereby averting a gap in the diary and consequently a loss of income. Likewise, a patient that fails an appointment is unlikely to do so again if the correct verbal skills are used when calling them about their non-attendance.

Team members should remember to always be clear, concise and polite. If they know their role, then they will never fail short if they focus on these key points.

Five-star first impressions

Ian Stead offers some tips on running an effective and efficient reception desk

For those principals looking to take their practice to another level, a well-run reception desk is a must. In today’s competitive world, patients have higher expectations than ever before, and those who have had experience at a practice will never return. Excellent communication skills and administration skills are necessary to deliver the necessary five-star standard of customer service.

Ideally, you should begin by reviewing the whole patient journey through your practice, from the first contact with a potential customer through to the final visit on a course of treatment. This will provide you with an overview that will enable you to make the necessary changes to reflect how you would like things to happen in the future, and create a standard of service.

Many times we have heard dental surgeons tell us that their teams are exceptionally good at treatment you will be able to explain the way through the patient’s journey through your practice, ensuring that money is not spent in areas that may be interested in, such as tooth whitening. They may also not be clear about the particular concerns they might have pertaining to treatment options.

By using a questionnaire of this type, you will be able to ensure your patient in a discussion that revolves around achieving their desired outcomes, rather than making assumptions about their requirements. For instance, assuming that they do not have an interest in a particular opinion because they have not mentioned it, can be an obstacle to greater uptake of higher value treatment plans.

Valuations: purchase, sale, buying in, retirement

Purchases: practices available countrywide

Sales: totally confidential service for vendors

Practice loans arranged for any purpose from 0.95% above base rate.