What makes a successful implant practice?

Through motivational case presentations and a greater sense of teamwork between restorative and surgical practices, doctors can build successful implant practices. Dr Roger P Levin explains

Implants represent an untapped source of growth for many practices. According to market research firm Kalorama Information, dental implants are poised to reach US$4.5 billion in global sales by 2012. Unfortunately, many restorative and surgical practices are operating far below their potential when it comes to implants.

What is hindering the growth of dental implants? In most instances, insufficient patient education is the culprit. When implants are presented to every candidate as an exceptional value that can last a lifetime, many patients will agree to implant treatment.

Patients need to think of implants as a standard quality of care option, not as an expensive luxury. It is important for you to present the many benefits that implants offer while emphasizing that no other service provides the functionality, fit and feel of natural teeth. Practices that improve their implant case presentations will see a significant increase in implant production.

Based on more than 24 years experience consulting to implant practices, Levin Group recommends the following Greenlight Case Presentation strategies for implants:

1. Make your implant presentation exciting. Fee-for-service procedures like implants have to be presented with a higher level of enthusiasm to motivate patients. Doctor and staff enthusiasm, effective visuals, clear explanations, compelling comparative stories and a strong recommendation to have implant procedures performed are vital to a fee-for-service case presentation. This approach is different than simply telling patients that they need a crown on a broken tooth and that insurance could probably cover approximately 50 per cent of it. The key is to recognize patients need a higher level of motivation to accept a recommendation for implants.

2. Focus on benefits, not the technical details. After a brief clinical explanation, you should make powerful benefit statements such as:

- "When you get your implant, you'll have a fuller smile and improved confidence.
- "Implants will give you a better quality of life.
- "Say goodbye to food restrictions! You can bite into a crunchy apple, chew your foods easier and avoid uncomfortable digestive problems.
- "Future bone loss will no longer occur when you have implants.
- "There is no extra work involved for you to care for your implants. Regular brushing and flossing along with routine dental examinations are all you need.

3. Don't perform a 'wallet biopsy.' Offer the ideal treatment to every patient. Making assumptions about treatment affordability or patients' ability to pay can derail a case presentation right from the start. In this age of casual dress, CEO's wear jeans and retail clerks dress in suits. Don't try to guess a patient's wealth or desire for treatment by how they dress.

4. Offer flexible payment options. Cost is always the final obstacle during case presentation, especially for services not fully covered by dental insurance. Levin Group clients incorporate The Four Financial Options into their practices to achieve case acceptance for implants and other services. The four options include:

- Five per cent courtesy for full payment upfront
- Half of the fee upfront and half before completion of treatment
- Credit cards
- Third-party financing

Not many people can pay for implants out-of-pocket. By offering flexible payment options, practices make implants affordable for more patients. Some practices are hesitant to offer third-party financing because they're afraid of losing a few percentage points of their total fee.

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Four habits of highly successful implant practices

In the course of consulting to thousands of dental practices, Levin Group has noted four characteristics common to highly successful implant practices:

1. Their philosophy is, ‘Dental implants are the treatment of choice for any patients missing teeth.’ They challenge themselves clinically to make dental implants work for any patient with missing teeth.

2. Doctors and teams understand that patient education is critical. They never assume that the patient knows about or has ever heard of dental implants. Analysis indicates that people who are familiar with dental implants do not necessarily request implant treatment. Instead, they tend to rely on the recommendations of their dentist.

3. These practices have a mindset that patients will want dental implants. In successful implant practices, team members are delighted to talk to patients about dental implants and feel confident that patients will accept implant treatment barring any contraindication or financial considerations.

4. A strong sense of teamwork exists between the surgical practice and the referring doctor. This pertains to education and close communication for implant case planning and treatment. Highly successful restorative practices not only work to continually educate themselves, but they also follow implant cases throughout the entire treatment process. These restorative practices take a pro-active approach, communicating with both the patient and the surgical practice from the initial referral to the restoration and follow-up. Of course, surgical practices should also provide updates on the patient’s progress during the placement phase of treatment. Strong communication throughout the treatment process ensures greater case acceptance, more patient referrals and increased implant production.

Conclusion

With millions of potential candidates in Europe, implants are a massive untapped source of revenue that has thus far evaded most dental practices. Given the numerous benefits that implants provide to edentulous patients, practices should regard implant treatment as a standard of care for every patient missing teeth.

Through motivational case presentations and a greater sense of teamwork between restorative and surgical practices, doctors can build successful implant practices. Implant dentistry enhances not only patient lifestyles, but also practice productivity – truly a win-win situation for the patient and the practice.

Dr Roger P Levin will be presenting his seminar, Achieve Explosive Implant Growth: Triple Your Implant Practice (Despite the Economy), on June 26 2009 in London. Don’t miss this chance to learn how to increase case acceptance and achieve greater productivity.

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