Are you sitting comfortably?

Adding some new chairs is a great way to revamp a tired waiting room, make the patient's experience comfortable and keep them coming back. Kathy Adams offers some interior design ideas.

Seating is an important part of the welcome your patients receive in your reception or waiting room area. Providing your patients with an inviting, comfortable and warm area to wait in, will not only boost your practice image, it will also help encourage your patients to want to return.

Furniture can also be used to create and project your practice’s chosen image. The type of furniture you choose will give a certain atmosphere to a room. For example, choosing clean, modern furniture can create an uncluttered, contemporary and airy ambience. So it’s good to explore the options before you buy, and think about what kind of mood you like to set.

Choosing a style

Patients’ requirements should always be considered when choosing chairs – after all, they will be sitting in them. Elderly patients may prefer a more supportive and higher chair, that’s easy to get in and out of, so it’s a good idea to have at least one chair with arms in your waiting space. Low seating creates a more luxurious and relaxing environment and can be suitable if you have a private patient base.

You might choose to create several different spaces, similar to that in a hotel lounge, with a variety of seats to meet the needs of a varied patient base. You could enhance the areas with low tables, a selection of magazines and the appropriate lighting to create the mood you would like to portray.

Occupy your younger visitors with small, fun seating. The furniture can be arranged to create a children’s area and can utilise a small awkward corner very well. Keeping the children busy can help to ensure a quiet and peaceful wait for all your patients, giving parents time to enquire at reception or fill in forms should they need to. For difficult small spaces, banquette or upholstered seating is a good choice.

Space-saving ideas

Stackable chairs work well in waiting and reception rooms. Popular for their versatility, they can be stored away leaving waiting spaces open for staff meetings and events, as well as making sure all floor surfaces are cleaned thoroughly.

With such a variety of fabrics available for chair upholstery, an easily cleanable or a Scotch-guarded fabric that gives resistance to spills, for example, is ideal for waiting room areas. A vinyl or leather would be my choice, as it will look good for longer, is cost-effective and available in different colours.

Investing in a relaxing environment can go a long way to attracting more revenue from both returning and new patients. Remember, you are purchasing for a commercial space and not a domestic environment. Ideally your seating should meet BS EN 12727 contract level three to stand up to the usage of a public space such as a busy practice.

Don’t ignore your chairs

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I’ve followed the development of the customer-service revolution in dentistry for many years. In the process, my own practice has been transformed as my vision and personal interests have developed – from a family general practice to a practice which emphasises advanced restorative and cosmetic dentistry, which relies on our reputation for excellent customer care (and of course good dentistry) to retain existing and recruit new patients. However, this is easy to say – not so easy to implement in practice.

A friend of mine who remains loyal to his National Health Service practice is facing a decision. His practice is going ‘private’ in the near future, and he expressed his feelings very strongly to me. ‘I know what you provide at your practice and the level of attention and service is unbelievable – but I don’t want to spend that much on my teeth.’ Fair enough. However, he continues: ‘If my dentist goes private, they’d better up their game. Do they expect me to pay more for the same when I don’t even get a hello or a how are you?’ Notice – not a comment on the dentistry. Is he going to be satisfied with ‘we’ll spend more time with you?’ I doubt it.

Upping your game

Of course, in modern dental practice, the clinical dentistry has to be the best you can deliver. Membership of organisations such as the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, or the Association of Dental Implantology, provide excellent educational and networking opportunities without the necessity to travel abroad. Nevertheless, any time away from the practice has a cost implication. An investment in postgraduate education is an investment which should be reflected in an increase in your fees. Meanwhile, your patients do have a choice about where they spend their hard earned money, and one of the factors they will use in differentiating between your practice and the competition is the level of service they receive. Where does your practice position itself with regards to customer care?

Extreme customer service

Dr Tom Orent from New England wrote a book called Extreme Customer Service – in other words, going over the edge in terms of what is expected. The book is full of illustrations from...