Making Patients Feel Special
Glenys Bridges discusses patient plans

In this economic climate most people regularly make tough spending decisions. In some cases they must deny themselves one necessity in favour of another. Although it’s true that some top end practices seem to be relatively unaffected by the double (potentially triple) dip recession, many have seen a dramatic fall in income from elective, cosmetic procedures. Under these circumstances this article asks, “How in the UK where 50 per cent of the population were not regular dental attenders during the previous favourable economic climate, can we attract patients into best fit options to maintain their oral health during the current financial climate?”

When practices with a well-structured maintenance plan are losing patients for financial reasons it may be that by reviewing the way they offer their plans to patients needs to be revised. Plan patients will have two objectives, one objective being to spread the cost of their oral care and the other to save some money for the course of the year.

Care Standard
A well-priced plan will allow a patient with a good standard of home care to save money on two oral health checks and scale and polishes by paying a monthly direct debit to the practice plan. Although this will involve the practice in a monthly administration charge, this will be more than balanced out by the monthly income and potential sales of home care products on each visit.

Promoting maintenance plans need not be based solely on a financial basis. There is also the opportunity to build in added value for patients through customer care benefits linked to a loyalty scheme. Alongside the clear value of spreading the cost of
basic oral well-being maintenance, plan patients can be assured that enhanced measures are in place to ensure that their customer care needs are fully recognised and understood in appreciation for their loyalty to the practice, by opting to pay a monthly direct debit.

Examples

Presenting plans to prospective new plan patients should involve examples of how much they would have saved over the previous year on their assessments, scales (and treatment if the Plan offers discounts on standard private treatment fees). This will require a one-to-one discussion with each patient. This should take place in a private, low pressure, ethical selling environment, always making it clear that it is perfectly OK if the patient chooses not to join the plan.

Once a patient is on a plan the practice needs to go the extra mile to thank them for their loyalty. Without any doubt every patient is entitled to the best possible standard of dental care. Beyond the clinical care plan, patients can be offered special discounts on home care products and first choice of priority appointments. This requires notes to be made about each patient’s preferred appointment. Another service that can be offered to plan patients is regular updates on the latest developments in clinical and home care options.

Dental businesses need to be aware of the best offerings from their competitors; not other dental practices, rather the companies competing for the same disposable income those patients would spend on their dental plan. These companies will be gyms, spas and designer labels, all of who use their marketing to make people purchasing their brands feel ‘special’. As dentistry is a highly personal business making patients feel special and cared about is a must when asking them to commit to us and offer their undivided loyalty.

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About the author

Glenys is an experienced management trainer and assessor with 20 year experience of working with General Dental Practitioners and their teams. In addition, she has expertise and qualifications in Counselling and Life Coaching. Her first book Dental Practice Management and Reception was published in 2006 her second book, Dental Management in Practice was published during 2012.

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