In the centre of attention – How to run a patient centered dental clinic

By Eniko Simon

D uring any work advising dental practices, many practice owners complain about not having enough patients, or that patients do not return for treatment. It is a common problem in any dental business.

In this article I wish to share some tips to help you to reduce these problems and explain how could a patient centered clinic management approach enhance patient journey aid the success of a dental business.

Treatment Acceptance

Whenever we decide to buy a product or a service we do it for one simple reason; we decide to buy it as it offers a solution for our problem. We buy a laptop as we want to work on the go, we buy a mobile phone so people can reach us anywhere.

Dentistry is no different – your patients will buy the treatment as long as it provides a solution to her/his problem and the decision has to be your patient’s.

The following simple steps can aid the treatment acceptance in your clinic:

- Focus on the “Why” – Why has the patient decided to come and visit the dentist. I have learned as a “treatment coordinator” that the patient is not buying the dental implant; he/she is buying a solution to not having a removable denture, or a solution that closes the spaces and height of the tooth to replace a missing one.
- Don’t talk but listen – Ask open questions to understand the problem. The treatment coordinator plays a vital role in increasing treatment acceptance.

The Role of the Treatment Coordinator

The treatment coordinator role has grown steadily in the US and UK in the past 10 years. The treatment coordinator is not only there to assist the dentist in preparing and presenting the treatment plan but also increasing the treatment conversion by providing an enhanced patient journey / patient experience in the dental clinic.

New patient consultation

The first consultation with the treatment coordinator is an informal chat between the patient and your treatment coordinator (TCO) when the TCO asks questions to find out the dental concerns of the patient and introduces the clinic to the patient. It is really the first step to build rapport and make the patient feel comfortable in your clinic. This consultation should be a free consultation to your new patient that you can schedule before the clinical consultation.

Build rapport

The treatment coordinator assists the dentist in preparing the treatment plan and in presenting the treatment plan to the patient. He/She also spends some time more with the patient after the treatment plan has been presented to answer any further questions the patient may have and discuss payment options.

This discussion can also help to overcome any objections or doubts the patient may still have. The treatment coordinator should be a trusted contact who is there to stump the patient all the way through the journey within the clinic.

Keeping in touch

The treatment coordinator should be the one who follows up with the patients – after treatment planning, making the patient care process as smooth as possible, the treatment coordinator plays a vital role in increased treatment acceptance and increased profit. If you wish to implement the role of a treatment coordinator or would like to get to know more about how a TCO could help your clinic, please contact me. I am happy to answer any questions.

Contact Information

Eniko Simon

Phone & Associates Dental Clinic

Dental Business Manager

Consultant

eniko@dradubai.com

About the Author

Eniko Simon is a consultant in dental practice management. She has been providing management consultations to dental practices in the UAE for more than 10 years. Her experience includes a wide range of practice management aspects such as practice growth, patient retention, tooth replacement, and new patient acquisition and retention. Her passion is to help dental practices achieve a balance between financial success and patient care.

Preparing for the worst

By Fiona Stuart-Wilson

E ach year some practices have to deal with an emergency – not a medical emergency but a business emergency. Although most of us buy insurance, we do so on the basis that we hope that the risks we are insuring our practices against will never actually happen. Of course the likelihood of the sort of risk occurring which would affect our ability to operate as a dental practice is low but there is no getting away from the fact that the unexpected does happen, and insurance is really crucial in such a case.

Disasters can take a long time to recover from and patients need to be seen and cared for during this time. All this means that a practice should always have a plan should disaster strike. You might this sort of thing could never happen to your practice but it could.

Your practice should have a business continuity to enable it to continue to function and survive a disaster, so here are some things every dentists and man- ager should consider.

1. What could go wrong?

Disasters by their very nature are usually unexpected but that does not mean we should not try to forecast some of the greater risks that we face.

Think through some of the risks to your practice and what these might mean for the practice. This could include accidents such as fire, natural disaster, loss of key members of staff or crime.

2. How safe is practice property?

Make sure your practice is as prepared as it can be to survive a disaster. Carry out a regular check on how secure your build- ing, equipment, computer sys- tems, records and website are.

For instance how many people have access to the burglar alarm code or keys? How often is the code changed? Are valuable documents such as a mobile phone, and rented or left in a desk drawer?

If you haven’t already, consider photographing all of your valu- able and equipment for insurance purposes and copies of key documents such as insur- ance policies. Make sure these are in a safe place more than one trusted person knows about.

3. Where else could we work from?

If disaster strikes your patients may need a safe place to be cared for and you will need to run your dental business. You should have arrangements in place now for an alternative location to treat patients or at least send them to the in the event that you cannot see them in your own practice.

It’s not just the clinical side of things either. You also need to think about where you will carry on running your non-dental business of your practice, such as contacting patients, arranging or cancelling appointments, administration, and paying bills and staff. This might of course be your home but if your information and data are not on the Cloud, make sure your backup operations site has critical equipment and data (computer, telephone, headed paper, back-ups etc) and essen- tial information such as contact numbers and e-mail addresses for all of your team, suppliers and of course your insurance company. Copies of insurance policies, debt and credit cards, and copies of passwords are also a good idea to make sure that you and at least one other key person has this information. After all disaster could strike whilst people are on holiday on the other side of the world.

4. Do our staff know what to do?

Make sure that your team knows what your back up plan is and when and where they should relocate to work in the event of an emergency.

5. How will we pay the bills and keep going?

If you have to leave your prac- tice premises you won’t know how long it will be before you can return. If you have to leave them in a hurry, take the practice cheque book, some cash, key cards and keep enough cash on hand to meet emergency cash- flow needs.

6. How will we tell the patients?

You will need to let patients know quickly in the event of an emergency or disaster, as they need to be reassured, told what to do and where to go. Make sure for example you have an arrangement in place with your website provider so that they can put this information on the home page of the website as quickly as possible. Save time later by writing that information copy now! It should include your emergency contact information, details of your backup surgery premises, and what to do about appointments. You can also use social media to get the word out about your emergency arrange- ments.

Just as we buy insurance hoping we will never need to make a claim, so when we think about a business continuity plan is one that we will never have to imple- ment. However going through this process does mean that you will have done the best for your practice and that you are pre- pared should disaster strike.