BY DR. Ehab Heikal

The first impression is the final impression, but...?

From a fancy looking clinic to a friendly smile, first impressions are no doubt the most vital impression you will ever make in business. So it is important to get it right first time.

But no, this does not just mean making sure that your feet aren’t out of place when serving a customer or making sure there is a permanent smile imprinted on your face at all times. It is more about the other details.

First impressions are really important in any industry, but in the current economic climate they are more important than ever before. Our patients are continually faced with making so many decisions. We have to make the right impressions in their minds to make it easier for them to choose us. This is a vital part of any dentist practice management program.

Shifting away from an obsession with first impressions is vital as it can be overwhelming. So shift well clear of only treating your patients extremely well on your first-ever contact with them. We all know that in the current economic situation it can be very easy to lose some of your most valued customers, so be sure not to count your chickens before the eggs have hatched!

To prevent any loss of patient reassurance it is important to make sure that your story and message of who you are, what you do is in line with each other. There is no room for discrepancies.

All the expenditure we do to stay in business is dependent upon patients going ahead with our diagnosed treatment recommendations. Our clinical skill is of no consequence if we do not get the opportunity to benefit our patients with it. So, to grow our businesses we need our strategies to comply with patient perceptions.

Once created, first impressions are very difficult to change or eliminate. These mindsets then affect every subsequent decision that patient makes. It will either make your future dealings with the patient easy or difficult; this is why any comprehensive dental practice management strategy should consider this.

It is vital not to take any chances. Everything your patients experience as a result of doing business with you must be exceptional. Everything you and your team, say and do must match up and be the same thing. For example, if your sign and exterior of your practice looks good and you are based in a good location but your team and your services are not up to that limit of quality, then you will always reach below patient expectation.

It is important to note that your patient’s expectations are created primarily by several attributes, from past experience, to word of mouth, to the effectiveness of your marketing campaigns. If you do not at the very least meet those expectations, you will always disappointing your patients. For this reason, it is vital to deliver what you promise in your marketing. If you exceed the expectations your patients walk into your practice with, then you will have developed a fan for life!

By Fiona Stuart-Wilson

I t we lived in an ideal world where nothing ever went wrong, patients always took up treatment plans and arrived for their appointments on time and staff never went sick we probably wouldn’t need to talk about managing performance. Although, we might want to believe that staff know what they need to do and will get on with it to the best of their ability at all times, we all know this is unlikely to happen.

The success of your practice is in the hands of everyone within it and depends on their delivering a good service. Any weak link in the chain will have a negative effect on the standard you want. Performance management is to make sure that the performance of your team contributes to the success of your practice, and taking action to improve things when this does not happen.

If you manage performance effectively it will mean that everyone in your practice understands:

• what the practice is trying to achieve;
• their role in helping the practice achieve its objectives;
• what they need to know and what they need to be able to do to fulfil their role;
• the standards of performance required;
• how they can develop their own performance and contribute to development of the practice;
• how they are doing, and if there are performance problems what can be done about them.

However, good performance management looks at how people do their job as well as what they get done. So, how a person approaches their job, or the way they behave as part of a team or communicate with patients and the rest of the team is just as important as what tasks they achieve.

For example, your receptionist might make appointments with unfailing accuracy. Their performance might be described as good. However this receptionist might be routinely unfriendly to patients. In the latter case we are highly unlikely to describe their performance as ‘good’; as we are measuring it on how they do their job (their behaviour) and not solely on what they do (their activity).

Performance management however is more than simply trying to get staff to do things which will help the practice achieve its objectives. Handled well it can encourage both the giving and receiving of feedback, and unlock ideas for improvement and innovation, clarify standards, and foster greater communication.

Clarify and communicate the aims of the practice
You want people to deliver the objectives that have been set for your practice. Your staff’s performance can only be measured in terms of the practice’s performance. Things often fall down and business performance can falter because the objectives of the practice have not been clarified and established by the practice owners. Everyone needs to know what the practice objectives are, and you need to remind people of them frequently to keep them focussed. As you achieve certain milestones, don’t forget to tell your staff about what they have achieved!

Clarity of people’s roles
Make sure that you have clear and detailed job descriptions and person specifications and update them when working practices change. Job descriptions describe what you expect people to do. Person specifications should outline the qualities and qualifications that your staff need to have in order to fulfil their roles effectively and focus on the ‘how’ people carry out their role.

Make sure that you have clear policies
Your policies are your ‘book of rules’, clear statements about the way your practice should operate. If you do not tell people what they should be doing you cannot complain if they don’t do it.

Know how to get good performance
Make sure that you know how to help people improve through training, coaching and development opportunities to get them to the standard you want.

Provide honest and constructive feedback
Give open, honest and direct feedback regularly so that people know what they are doing well just as much as what they are not doing well, and establish a performance review system which allows for two way discussion.

We all want staff who are engaged, take pride in their job and show loyalty towards the practice. If your team can see the bigger picture and how their role contributes to the success of the practice they are more likely to do their best for you. Performance management is about continuously improving the performance of individuals and in so doing improving practice performance.

And that’s just not good for the practice – it’s good for patients too!
Look at the bigger picture

By Eniko Simon

Analyze data to understand the performance of your dental business.

There are many important decisions we have to make when managing a dental clinic—so we make these decisions on gut instinct or based on previous experiences or by analyzing data that is available for us.

Most of the dental clinics I have been working with had some understanding of the power that data can add to their business. It is essential that you regularly track a wide range of data across your clinic to allow you to have a good understanding of your business. Nowadays there are fantastic dental software such as Software of Excellence or R4 very well known on the market. These dental software can assist dental businesses to analyse important key performance indicators gain a better understanding of their business.

Some data that you need to look at— who are your patients, how did they hear about your clinic, nationality, age group, your chair occupancy in your clinic, the hourly turnover your associates generating, how many new patients you have monthly and many more KPI’s we can look at. Undeniably collecting clean and reliable data and analysing it in a consistent way is part of 21st century management.

Data is the fundamental ingredient in decision making, figuring out where to focus your resources, create your targeted marketing approach.

Taking control of your data

The data on its own has no meaning, it can not provide the full picture, it does not take into account the values you stand for and the culture you are trying to create in your dental business or your patients’ personal feelings they feel about your clinic.

Practice data alone can not be used to guide the success of the clinic. In order to fully utilize the facts and figures they need to be put into context. Hours spent collecting data is wasted if the bigger picture not taken into consideration.

The clinic’s short and long term goals needs to be agreed upon and once you are on your journey the collected data can demonstrate if you are on the right track to achieve your goals.

The numbers provide an effective tool to help manage and control the growth and development of your dental business but do not set the strategy you need to adopt.

Constantly analyse your data— look at how your clinic is performing. The right data at the right time will aid your decision making process regarding your finances, marketing, operations of your clinic—but be ensure that you control your data and put it into context.

Always understand the “whys” to know the way forward to the “hows.”

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