

NONCOMPLIANT PATIENTS

If noncompliant patients are allowed to remain in a dentist's practice despite their behavior, the dentist could be facing allegations of supervised neglect. Any care provided must be within the standard of care, but the patient's refusal of a specific treatment doesn't allow the dentist to achieve this standard. Terminating care may be the only reasonable option. If a dismissed patient wants to return, it's inadvisable to accept them back.

FRIENDS AND RELATIVES

Although dentists often want to help their friends or relatives by providing affordable dental care, they may do so against their better judgment. Scenarios can become uncomfortable and escalate into high-risk situations. Documentation must be done religiously. Any care or treatment of a

friend or family member must be the same as for other patients.

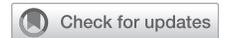
Clinical Significance

It can be hard to refuse to accept a patient for treatment but sometimes refusing to include the patient in your practice is the best choice for you. It's important to trust your instincts and avoid patients or treatment plans that make you feel uncomfortable.

TDIC Risk Management Staff: Patient selection: Instincts, courage and healthy relationships. *CDA J* 47:187-188, 2019

Reprints not available

Patient-centric practices



BACKGROUND

Businesses that cater to the needs of customers and place customer satisfaction at the top of their goals are able to cultivate a sense of loyalty in their customers. Dentists can learn from companies such as Amazon and Disney, borrowing methods that will help to build successful practices. The pathway to a patient-centric practice involves several strategies.

DEFINING PATIENT-CENTRIC PRACTICE

A patient-centric practice prioritizes the patient experience in all areas of practice management. Among the areas that are adapted to patient needs are the appointment process, chair time, collections, follow-up, and everything in between. This hyper-focus on patient satisfaction extends throughout all areas of the interaction. Often technologic advances to make dentistry more convenient, more accessible, and more enjoyable for patients are employed, but the personal touch must be retained.

STRATEGIES

Connecting with the Office

Communication in a patient-centric dental office should be by e-mail and text messaging because those are the ways patients like to communicate. Patients will actually respond to e-mails and text messages. The messages are delivered in real time and provide ways for patients to confirm their appointments, reschedule, or be contacted for an earlier appointment should

an opening in the schedule occur. Patients like the convenience of these methods. Companies that provide services like these to dental practices include Lighthouse360 and Weave Communications.

Making Treatment Affordable

Patients often defer or refuse treatment if they know they can't afford it. Often they are embarrassed when they can't afford needed care, and dental professionals can be frustrated with the situation. The answer is to provide alternative payment options that help patients afford the treatment but also sends the message that the dentist is willing to make special efforts to provide needed care.

Several automated patient financing services are available. This lessens the burden of managing the program and keeps patients better informed and in charge of their own payment plans. Payment alternatives help dentists provide needed and wanted services to patients in a way that fits their situation.

Expanding Services

Changes seem to occur daily in dental practices. Innovative tools and new procedures often help improve profitability for dentists but also have great patient appeal because they save time and minimize patient discomfort. Dentists should stay up-to-date on what patients want so they can offer these services. Among the popular current trends are same-day restorations, in-office whitening treatments, and intraoral scanners, which reduce laboratory fees, improve communication

with dental technicians, and eliminate the need for messy and uncomfortable impressions. These and other services may require the purchase of new equipment or going to a seminar to learn new techniques, but expanding the range of services provided can attract new patients as well as allow the office to better serve current ones.

Providing Information Online

The practice website plays a vital role in marketing the dental office and provides new patients with their first impressions of the practice. All the information in the website should be current and meet the needs of the patients. It's vital to keep the website fresh and inviting.

Some features that can be added are the virtual communication features (online appointment scheduling and real-time chat, for example). These make the office available to patients at any hour and don't require the staff to monitor the site around the clock. Patients also like having a secure portal where they can view their accounts and pay outstanding balances. This can increase collections percentages and contribute to the impression that the practice is up-to-date and easy to access. Sites should also be mobile-friendly and HTTPS compliant so patients can access them from any device or on any network. Contact information and location should be prominently displayed to ensure patients and prospective patients are aware of this information.

Encouraging Online Reviews

Prospective patients may initially be interested in the dental practice because of what they've heard from friends or family, but online reviews play an important role in making connections with those who don't have such connections. In addition, online reviews can provide valuable feedback to the dentist

about his or her services. Patient testimonials on sites such as Google, Facebook, and Yelp can be increased by using a service that lets the practice automatically send post-appointment surveys to patients. When patients are asked about their opinions and feedback, positive comments are often elicited. Patients see that the dentist is willing to listen to their input and use the information to understand patient expectations. Dentists who capitalize on the opportunities online review offer and learn what is working and what isn't will continue to see growth in their practices. Patient turnover can be diminished, recall increased, and production expanded. The practice will also obtain a unique personality in the view of its patients and be seen as a patient-centric office.

Clinical Significance

Becoming a patient-centric dental practice can be a challenge but the benefits that are seen are well worth the efforts made. Patients want to come to a dentist who cares about their needs, provides special services such as payment plans and easy-to-access information, and structures the entire experience to make them comfortable. It's what will keep them coming back for their dental care and what they'll tell all their friends about.

Cooper N: Five strategies to build a patient-centric dental practice. *Inside Dent* 14:12, 14, 2019

Reprints not available

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Changes when times are hard



BACKGROUND

In most urban areas, dental offices are everywhere, so the level of competition can be significant. If your dental practice is having too many days when the schedule isn't full and you feel like each day you're struggling to cover expenses, it may be time to take a hard look at the practice and see what might be keeping you from growing.

DENTAL STAFF ISSUES

Everyone on the dental staff needs to be a team player. Ideally, your employees will be able to almost read each other's minds

and work in harmony. If staff members aren't getting along, communication is hampered—and the patients notice the tension.

If someone isn't being a team player, it's important to address the issue immediately. First, you should talk to the employee and issue a verbal warning. If things don't improve, a written warning should be given, and if no change results, it's time to dismiss that employee. Often the problem is a personality problem and no matter how many chances you give the employee, the situation just won't work long-term.