

occur if the staff members believe that the dentist has heard them and understands and empathizes with them.

Handling the Unexpected

Sometimes things occur that are beyond the dentist's or the staff's control. It's important to deal with the situation through empathetic listening. If the situation involves an unexpected need for additional treatment and the patient seems distraught, the source is likely the simple fact that it wasn't what the patient expected and he or she was unprepared. Through empathetic listening, the dentist can employ communication that reflects the emotional component of the situation back to the patient and then can offer a solution that will help to make the situation better.

This is a powerful EQ tool because it relies on a connection based on emotion, which creates openness to the advice that is then offered. Often individuals go straight to the solution, but it's important to acknowledge the emotional component. In addition to the dentist doing this, staff members should deliver the same message. This is the way to turn a difficult experience into an example of how the dental practice cares about the patient.

Situations Where the Dentist Is Overwhelmed, Stressed, and Burned Out

A common complaint of dental practice owners is their struggle with separating home and business concerns. When a dentist's entire being is wrapped up in the practice, it's likely that he or she won't find happiness in either home or office. Although many factors contribute to this struggle, a few key components can be addressed to help overcome the problem.

To understand that the dental office is not the dentist's everything, he or she should focus on some *human* questions. These include asking the following: Who am I? What am I passionate about? What are my values and goals? What do I do outside of the office? Do I take part in any non-goal-oriented activities? How am I creative and caring? Becoming self-aware through the answers to these questions can help to reduce the cascade

of emotions that can create stress and burnout. The goal is to have the dentist diagnose himself or herself just as he or she would diagnose a patient in order to better understand episodes of anger or frustration. These episodes should be documented so their occurrence can be tracked, which will help provide clarity in understanding them.

Cultivating habits outside of dentistry can also ease the dentist's mind. It's important to engage in creative pursuits and to take time away from work for recreational activities. Creative problem solving during these activities can help with day-to-day problem solving activities. This will help to strengthen the dentist's EQ skills.

It's also important to focus on values and non-negotiable aspects of life. This includes family, friends, and relationships outside of the office. Having people in his or her life helps to support the dentist and even can lead to resetting his or her mindset when that is needed.

Clinical Significance

Waiting until we reach the point where we feel overwhelmed, stressed out, and ready to quit is an extremely unproductive way to handle problems, even small ones. It's important to ensure that we are emotionally healthy as well as physically healthy to achieve our goals. The dentist's mind is the most valuable asset he or she has and its EQ strength is an important determinant of the greatness that can be achieved.

Angadi S: Improve your EQ. *Dentaltown*, Jan 2019, pp 92-96

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FIRST VISIT

Perfecting first patient interactions



BACKGROUND

New patients are the lifeblood of a dental practice that wants to grow. The first appointment of a new patient is an opportunity to make a lasting impression, and the entire staff should be engaged to ensure that the marketing and referral efforts that went into attracting that patient won't go to waste.

BEFORE THE VISIT

Once an individual has scheduled an appointment, a team member should call the day before the visit to help familiarize the individual with the practice and answer questions. This is a good time to ask about any special requests the patient may have. A positive end to these calls is an enthusiastic reminder that the

team member is looking forward to seeing the new patient the next day.

To experience the visit from the new patient's perspective, the dentist should enter through the designated patient door and observe the surroundings as if he or she is the patient. Is the entrance free of trash? Does it look clean and fresh, with paint in good condition and glass surfaces free of smudges and fingerprints? Is the reception room clean and modern with comfortable seating? New patients will begin formulating an opinion of the practice from the time they arrive and will notice these things.

GREETINGS

The receptionist should be trained to greet all patients with a genuine smile of welcome. For new patients, someone from reception should walk out and welcome them with a handshake. If paperwork needs to be completed, it can be handed to the new patient along with explanations about the forms. Any questions the patient has can also be answered. The patient may be offered a cup of water, juice from a small refrigerator, or coffee, which can be made using a single-serve coffee maker.

During the wait, the reception room should provide current magazines to read or have a television to watch. The television should be on a channel with programs having broad appeal or the practice could subscribe to dental programming for a reasonable fee. The dental television programming should be customizable to include information specific to the practice and educational offerings regarding dental care.

The waiting room can also include a portfolio of treatment pictures illustrating the various types of procedures that the practice offers. New patients may develop ideas about future treatment from such pictures.

Although having a short time to wait is the goal for all patients, the wait time should be kept especially short for new patients, who are still formulating opinions about the practice. If prophylaxes are normally done during a new patient's first visit, it's wise to ensure that the hygienist performs a painless cleaning, even if that requires the patient to return for a touch-up or more definitive periodontal treatment after inflammation has subsided.

DENTIST-PATIENT INTERACTIONS

Appearances

When it's time for new patients to see the dentist, wait time should be less than 5 minutes if at all possible. Once they have become established patients, they will be more likely to be forgiving if the wait is a bit longer.

The patient should be seated upright when the dentist comes in. The dentist should greet the patient by name, smile pleasantly, and shake his or her hand. A friendly smile goes a long way to welcoming the patient. It's important to make comfortable eye contact without staring and to maintain good posture. New

patients should be addressed by their names, a simple way to make them feel more comfortable. A key to remembering the name is to repeat it within the first 5 seconds of hearing it.

Dentists should be aware of their body language. This means evidencing confidence but not overconfidence. It's important to maintain the chin up and the shoulders straight. Patients tend to be more positively inclined toward a doctor who looks like he or she is confident and competent.

Dentists need to respect the patient's personal space, approaching to just about 2 feet directly surrounding him or her. This is a comfortable distance for most conversations.

Communication

The dentist should begin the interaction with questions and a genuine interest in getting to know the patient. This can have a significant impact on the patient's perception of the dentist. As the discussion progresses, the dentist should use open-ended questions to help identify patient values so that he or she can customize the information provided to match those values. If the dentist must use technical terms when speaking to an assistant who may be recording the dentist's observations, it's important to let the patient know that the meaning of the terms and observations will be explained in simpler language once the examination is complete.

FOLLOW-UP

Once the patient's visit is completed, he or she should be scheduled for the next visit. Rather than asking if the patient wants to make an appointment, the receptionist should ask about the best time for the next appointment. Any new patients who don't care to make an appointment should be followed up with a phone call later. All new patients should also receive a card in the mail to tell them how happy the dental team is that they have joined the practice.

Clinical Significance

Paying attention to the little things is an essential part of making a patient's first visit successful and satisfying. This includes ensuring the environment is welcoming, the staff is friendly and helpful, and the dentist is respectful and caring. All patients should receive these considerations, but established patients may be willing to give the practice the benefit of the doubt if an occasional lapse occurs. The first visit of a patient must go as perfectly as possible to convey the right message, which is, "We'd love to be your dentist."

Gangwisch RP: A patient's first visit. *Inside Dent* 15:12,14, 2019

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