



TAKE HOLD OF YOUR PRACTICE AGAIN

By Lynn Garber

You are responsible for your own destiny! The successful dental practice not only delivers quality treatment, but manages every part of the patient's needs around receiving that treatment with professional responsibility. Maintaining a fee for service practice depends on placing value on your service. The patient must be made aware of what you are doing for them via continuous education, communication and service.

When was the last time you took the time to look at your practice objectively? Monitor the way the telephone is answered, go over your scheduling procedures and financial arrangements, know if your recommended treatment is being accepted and completed, know if your patients are staying in your practice. Techniques for keeping your practice healthy must be constantly monitored, updated and changed to meet changes in the outside environment that affect your business, such as managed care.

The Telephone

The telephone is the patient's first introduction to your. Not only must it be answered in a friendly manner, but the caller must be made to feel that they are the only thing of importance at that moment. The patient must feel that they are being heard. You need to have a script for answering the telephone and your telephone must be answered the same way each time it rings.

Suggested opening script, "Good morning/afternoon, Dr. _____'s office, _____ speaking. How may I help you?" this lets the caller know where they called, whom they are speaking with and opens the door for them to tell you why they called.

When was the last time you telephoned your office and monitored the way your telephone is being answered? Do it!!!

Scheduling

Busy-ness versus productivity. Having a busy appointment book is not a sign of being productive, it only means you are busy. Are you earning the dollars you want to? Can you start and complete a case in a timely manner? Do you stay on time? These are the issues that determine success and place a value on your service.

Most practices I see do set production goals, but they are set monthly,

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not daily. To be more effective in scheduling and productive in your practice, you must set a daily production goal and pre-block your appointment each day that will allow you to meet this daily goal and complete your patients' treatment in a timely manner.

Some other tips for effective scheduling might be:

1. Each appointment made must have, along with the patient's name, the tooth number, surface and procedure for that day's treatment.

2. Schedule by operatory, the treatment room is often not available even if the patients' treatment for that day has been completed.

3. Schedule two appointments in the morning and two right after lunch, one that needs an injection and one that does not.

It's time to sit down with your staff and review your scheduling goals and procedures.

Finances

Paying for their dental treatment is always a concern to the patient. With dwindling dental insurance reimbursements and more managed care, your office must become competitive with the

retail marketplace in financing. Do you have a variety of ways for your patients to pay for their dental treatment? Are you creative and flexible in your financial arrangements?

There are a variety of ways you can offer more payment options to your patients:

1. Offer your patients a percentage courtesy for payment in full before treatment starts.

2. Credit cards.

3. Extend payments longer in your office. Careful if you decide on this option. You must be set up to check on the patients' credit rating through a credit bureau.

4. Offer twelve months' interest free financing. There are companies now offering dental loans; you can set up with them to pay the interest for your patients, you receive your money and the patient makes payment directly to them.

These are only a few areas of your practice that need to be consistently monitored (there are more suggestions in this issue of Practice Power from Linda and Lisa) and changed when indicated. Take charge, stay involved in every aspect of your practice; this will keep your practice healthy and on the cutting edge.

