

## Practice organisation



# A five star service

**Tracy Stuart** looks at some of the ways you can improve your practice

Sales and marketing is now a crucial part of modern dentistry. It is the responsibility of the entire dental team to be able to 'sell' treatments to patients. In a sense, your team should be able to effectively convert prospective patients into clients with consummate ease, finding out their needs and explaining how those needs can be met.

Telephone queries need to be handled with expertise. The impression created by your receptionist over the phone will make the difference between whether a patient chooses your practice or that of a competitor. Today's patient will accept nothing less than five-star service across the board. Perfection is perhaps impossible to attain, but you can only gain from striving to improve your service.

The role of the dentist has changed. Now, you need first-rate leadership skills and the ability to not only run a business, but also manage and motivate a team that will achieve the targets you set. As you attend courses and develop your skills, you should be able to rely on your team to help you then market new treatments to patients.

The patient care co-ordinator is the conduit along which the new clients flow into the practice. The patient care co-ordinator will handle finance discussions with patients, and will always need to be willing to ask patients for payment. This can be an uncomfortable role, but with the right skills, the team member can really help money flow into the business.

There is a variety of ways to gain the required skills. Programmes are available that will enable your team to develop superior communication skills, to further develop all of your processes when it comes to patient care. Some programmes can help you reach a new level of success in just four days.

Before you can appraise how such a service can help you and your business, ask yourself the following questions about how your practice functions. Be honest; this exercise should illustrate which areas can be improved, and what can be done to improve them:

- Are phone calls answered efficiently?
- Are patients greeted with a smile?
- Do you issue patients with written payment options?
- Do patients receive welcome packs?
- Is your website regularly updated?
- Are your professional goals clear?
- Does your team know what the aims of the practice are?
- Do you know what makes your practice special?
- Does your team meet patient expectations?
- Do you have a comfort checklist?
- Are you doing the dentistry you enjoy?

There are a wealth of questions you could ask about modern dentistry that would reveal issues within the practice. However, your answers here should give you food for thought. An effective course in communication will help you to answer 'yes' to all of the above. By focusing on effective telephone scripts, your front desk team will be better able to deal with queries, will impress callers with their professionalism and knowledge, and will give more potential patients the confidence to make an appointment.

Some programmes will also review how new patients are greeted, and the documentation you hand out to them, and establish winning strategies to improve the service.

Role-play is a vital part of developing the necessary skills. Many people find this difficult and even intimidating, but the benefits are enormous. Role-play lets you practice your communication

techniques and will make you more confident when dealing with patients.

The revitalisation of your practice may include the implementation of meetings in the morning and evening. This lets teams develop smooth working processes, in which everyone knows their individual role, and the role of their colleagues. This helps you accurately monitor and control your business. Also, by implementing concepts like block booking and dove tailing into your appointment booking system, you will reduce stress and maximise available time.

With superior verbal skills, your team will be able to ascertain patient needs, especially the needs of new patients, and discuss options with them without making them feel as if they are being given the 'hard sell'. Also, by tracking the movement of patients from their first enquiry to when they leave the practice after treatment and beyond, you will have a better idea of how to market the treatments you have trained for, and most enjoy carrying out. This will help you feel fulfilled as a dental professional.

With a patient care co-ordinator programme, you can improve communication between the team and the patients, and the communication between the team members themselves turning the business into a well-oiled machine that will meet the targets you set for it, and deliver the high standard of care today's patients expect. It will also let you be the dentist you want to be. **PD**

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Tracy Stuart has 21 years experience in dentistry, working with management consultants from the US to implement innovative systems into the UK.