



THE DAILY GRIND

DRILLING DEEPER INTO DENTISTRY

A Well-Informed Patient Is a Must for the Modern Dental Practice

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Although dentistry seems to be evolving faster than ever, certain core concepts remain the same. One such concept is the importance of the “well-informed patient.” I use this phrase to encompass both clinical and non-clinical aspects of the dental practice. A patient who is well-informed about the non-clinical aspects of the practice has a firm grasp on the essence of that practice. These non-clinical aspects include the hours of operation, the website and social media accounts, fun and pertinent details about the providers, philosophies of the providers and the practice, and the list of services and amenities provided by the office. These are the everyday details that make up the practice, and their importance should not be overlooked.

With regard to services provided by the office, are you, your staff and your patients aware of all the services that your practice offers? Can each team member give a brief yet knowledgeable description about each procedure?

Creating well-informed patients is no easy task, and it certainly doesn't happen overnight. It takes a multifaceted approach that begins with a well-informed doctor and team. It wasn't long ago that most dental offices offered similar services — amalgam fillings, gold/porcelain crowns and bridges, extractions and dentures. But our profession began to evolve rapidly and expand. Resin restorations became an alternate to amalgam. Dental implants became an alternate to bridges or partial dentures. Lasers offered additional treatment options to a variety of dental procedures. The list of advancements seems to grow larger each year. It is imperative that your dental practice have a general standing goal that all doctors, staff and patients know each of the services offered.

I'm a firm believer that one of the best ways to learn customer service is to work in the restaurant or hospitality industry, especially as a server. Drawing from this idea, one of my favorite analogies to use with patients is to think of myself and my team as restaurant servers. One of the core tasks of the restaurant server is to make sure the patron knows all the available food on the menu. Several traditional ways to accomplish this are a standing written menu, a list of specials and server recommendations. Is our field of dentistry really any different? Not really. If your patients don't know you offer a certain procedure, they won't ask about it, or worse, they will go to a different office to have it completed. This is a clear detriment to your practice, but it's often a disappointment and inconvenience to your patient as well.

We don't typically use traditional written menus in the dental profession, so what are some ways to inform your patients about all the great services you offer? Release your inner marketing guru, and the possibilities are endless. Here are just a few ideas to get your thoughts flowing:

1. *Rely on your staff.* Your team is the most traditional, yet most valuable asset in creating well-informed patients. The dentist cannot be everywhere at once. It is vital that you take the time to educate your staff about each and every procedure offered and be sure to provide updates with new procedures, materials and methods. Ensure that each team member can give a brief yet knowledgeable description about each procedure offered. Consider using scripting for effectiveness and to standardize the messaging.
2. *Use internal marketing.* In-office signage is an effective method of getting your message out. These days there are numerous styles available, ranging from traditional print to digital options. Try different methods, but not all at once. A cluttered office full of signage is rarely viewed positively by patients.
3. *Maximize External marketing.* Social media accounts and your practice website have become the modern standard for reaching new patients, but don't underestimate other traditional methods such as newsletters or blogs. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, but all will certainly create a larger brand footprint for your practice, which will in turn educate existing and potential patients.

Well-informed patients are a necessity for today's dental practices, but creating such patients is no simple task. It takes a multifaceted approach that begins with a well-informed doctor and team. Once that is achieved, internal and external marketing strategies can be applied that can

be tailored to the specific practice needs. The phrase “knowledge is power” certainly applies to this discussion. Here’s to creating well-informed patients.

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