Care Enough to Provide an Exceptional Patient Experience

In dentistry, care is a verb, not a noun. We care about our patients and care about people. And the way we care directly impacts the patient’s experience which, in turn, directly impacts case acceptance and patient retention. Providing exceptional care is a process of purposeful actions that requires thought, effort, engagement by the entire dental team, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

In a thriving, busy practice, there never seems to be enough time in the day. Unfortunately, this busyness may cause the team to focus on getting things done instead of caring for patients. If our tone and communications with patients seems rushed and distracted, patients may feel unimportant to the practice. Take a breath and then a few minutes to purposefully communicate with patients, especially during these touch points:

1. **The telephone introduction.** Over the phone, patients have no idea what your day has been like or if you are busy or not. They cannot see your body language or the seven things sitting on your desk waiting to be done. So, if you are distracted and focused on getting off the phone to attend to something else, they may interpret your words and tone negatively. It only takes a few moments to be warm and welcoming before you get down to the business of gathering insurance information and scheduling appointments.

2. **The in-practice greeting.** When a patient guest comes into the practice, they should be greeted by name with the attitude that comes from understanding the patient has choices and the team appreciates the patient has chosen them.

3. **The patient/doctor introduction.** Take the time to respectfully introduce new patients to the doctor. “Mrs. Jones, I’d like to introduce you to Dr. Smith. As I mentioned, Dr. Smith has been doing amazing dentistry for more than 15 years. Dr. Smith, this is our new patient, Mrs. Jones. Mrs. Jones was referred to our practice by her friend, and our long-time patient, Mrs. Brown.”

4. **The treatment and financial conversation.** Patients should always be introduced to ideal dentistry. They may choose to phase treatment, but they need to know you care for their oral health and want what’s best for them. Patients should also be introduced to all payment options if they have an out-of-pocket expense. If you accept financing through a credit card like CareCredit, let them know and then let them choose what’s best for them.
5. **The post-appointment follow-up call.** A personal follow-up telephone call to the patient is a great way to demonstrate how much your team cares. Many practices routinely call the patient after a hygiene or restorative appointment. But the best opportunity to make an impact on the patient relationship is by calling after the new patient examination and consultation. New patients may have questions or concerns and when the office calls to provide additional information or just let the patient know they are available, patients’ expectations are exceeded.

### Caring Requires Consistency

I recently walked in the gift shop of a high-end hotel to buy a bottle of water. After waiting at the cash register for a few moments, I walked to the back of the shop to find someone to ring me up. What I found was the hotel employee ranting to herself about how much she disliked her job. Was she having a bad moment? Yes. But her words and attitude significantly and negatively impacted my perception of the hotel and my overall satisfaction.

A patient’s experience in a dental practice can be impacted similarly if their interaction with just one team member is negative. Caring is a team effort. People tend to pick up and absorb the emotions around them. When your team is consistently warm, engaging, excited and appreciative, patients will tend to be the same. When one team member is having a “bad day,” they can easily “infect” other team members and patients. So be diligent in caring enough to help each other have positive interactions with patients. You’ll be surprised how infectious good moods can be, too.

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