HOW TO IMPROVE CASE ACCEPTANCE FOR COMPLEX TREATMENTS: FOUR SUREFIRE WAYS TO GET TO “YES”

“MONEY AND FEAR ARE THE two most common barriers to treatment acceptance,” says Susan Richardson, director of marketing for ChaseHealthAdvance. This is especially true for dentists specializing in sometimes complex and expensive cosmetic and restorative procedures.

Getting patients to say yes—and actually see them walk through your practice door for their first treatment—is a skill set every practitioner needs in his or her little black bag.

HERE ARE FOUR TIPS TO help your practice convert more prospects into clients and more clients into loyal, repeat patients
“By training your entire team you provide the opportunity to expand their knowledge base to better support your case presentation with confidence,” according to Roger Levin, DDS, CEO of dental practice management firm, Levin Group, Inc. “More importantly, when you take time to train your staff, they recognize and appreciate your efforts to help them grow. In an ever-changing society where individuals seek more challenges, your practice should provide opportunities that allow staff members to learn, grow, and become more knowledgeable contributors to the practice’s success.”

For instance, continues Levin, “During the hygiene appointment, approximately 50 percent of the hygienist’s time should be spent educating and motivating the patient on comprehensive dentistry and the rationale for completing the dentistry in an appropriate time frame.”

In addition, Levin says, “Commit to presenting every patient with a comprehensive treatment plan. Many dentists pick and choose who they think will be interested in—and who would be able to afford—elective procedures. Make a commitment to provide a complete work-up for patients who are potential candidates for elective procedures. A comprehensive exam is an opportunity to make patients aware of what treatments your practice offers.”

Your team should be trained to listen to patient concerns, and then focus on the benefits of treatment. “Some dentists make the mistake of overwhelming patients with clinical details while under-emphasizing patient benefits,” says Levin. “This approach will often lead to decreased case acceptance, especially for cosmetic dentistry—an area driven entirely by the benefit of a brighter patient smile and a more attractive appearance.”

So invite your team to engage with patients—at the appropriate times—to encourage and support their treatment decisions.

**Case Acceptance is a Team Effort**

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PRESENT TO PATIENTS LIKE A PRO

Want to close more treatments and grow your practice? Have a system in place—one that allows you to deliver exceptional case presentations to educate and motivate patients about treatment benefits.

According to dental practice management consultant, Rhonda Mullins, “My clients find they achieve the greatest success when they consistently execute the following steps and apply this formula:

**TOP-LINE PEOPLE + FRONT-LINE ENGAGEMENT = ‘YES’ MOMENTUM”**

**STEP 1: CONTACT.** Appoint one or two top-line team members (preferably cross-trained assistants or administrative team members, qualified to be “concierges extraordinaire”—those who handle existing patient enrollments/treatment planning/financial options) for patients who have uncompleted care.

“Have them at hello,” says Mullins. “The concierge(s) should set the tone for care expectations, exceeding patient needs and creating an extraordinary experience.”

The concierge’s responsibility is to document any patient expectations, experiences, and fears, for example, so the entire team can over-anticipate the patient’s needs, and guide him/her through all the paperwork and explain why it’s necessary. When choosing this team for care, it’s vital to the patient’s decision that the doctor’s standards, qualifications, training, education, and passion are shared.

**STEP 2: CLARIFICATION INTERVIEW.** Take this opportunity to understand and improve your patient relationship medically, emotionally, clinically, and financially,” says Mullins. Paperwork should be used as a guide, but not the only guide. Ask open-ended questions for insight into the patient’s motivation for dental treatments and to help ensure a “yes” in the end.

**STEP 3: CREATE AND PRESENT.** Develop an interdisciplinary team approach to your case presentation synopsis by engaging your internal, top-line players—especially the financial facilitator. Direction and process should be specific for optimum patient results. Realistic expectations are vital for presentation success.

**STEP 4: COMMIT AND CONVERT.** Your top-line team should heighten the patient’s understanding of the transformation and ultimate investment. This is the conversion moment, when the patient’s decision will be based on feelings more than finances. “Your team should function as a ‘Solution Finder’ for the patient to stay in the ‘green light’ mode until money is received and the process initiated,” advises Mullins. “For solutions, a system must be in place to ensure transferability and predictable clinical and/or financial results. When you deviate from the system, you’re sure to miss out on getting that ‘yes’ from the patient.”
You’ve probably thought: “I’ve invested time and money establishing my clinical skills and understanding of smile design, but I don’t get the case acceptance I feel I should have.” In reality, some dentists communicate better than others. This means, unfortunately, some dentists aren’t able to practice esthetic restorative dentistry at the level and frequency they deserve.

Dentists are no exception to the adage, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” With computer digital imaging, pictures can be the “silent seller” of the dentist’s clinical ability. For those who struggle with the right words and to articulate case presentations clearly, the image is a godsend.

According to George Kirtley, DDS, founder of Envision a Smile, in a survey of 10 leading U.S. cosmetic dentistry practices producing $1.5 to 2 million dollars annually, the single most significant in-office sales tool for anterior esthetic dentistry is computer imaging.

Additionally, 50 smile makeover patients were asked: Outside doctor and staff credentials and your comfort level with them (i.e., trust), what was the most significant factor for your decision to have a smile makeover? The responses were resoundingly similar: “Being able to see myself with a new smile before the work was ever done.” The computer generated image plays a significant role in patient decisions.

“Computer dental imaging is an integral part of most highly successful esthetic/restorative dental practices,” says Kirtley. “It is the most visually important method of patient communication. It eliminates questions, conveys visual possibilities, and results in increased case acceptance. Further, it is a tool for enhanced communications with the ceramist/laboratory technician, resulting in decreased makeovers and accurate patient expectations.
Often, case acceptance simply comes down to money; the perception—by the patient—of his or her lack of money. “Up-front, clear communication about acceptable payment methods does help increase case acceptance,” says Susan Richardson, of ChaseHealthAdvance, “even in these challenging economic times.”

Richardson offers this case study to support her point: An Orthodontics firm in Florida began to see how patient purchasing decisions were impacted. Many opted to delay treatment. While the practice was offering extended payment plans from another patient financing company, only 3.8 percent of their patients selected this option. Most chose to wait until they could pay in full rather than pay double-digit interest.

The practice reevaluated how it could help patients move forward with treatment and decided it needed an attractive patient payment plan calling for zero money down and affordable, no-interest monthly payments.

In three months, nearly 40 percent of their patients are moving forward and choosing the ChaseHealthAdvance option. “We have been overwhelmed by how quickly treatment acceptance has turned around,” reports the practice. “This has

translated to our bottom line. Business is up 18 percent, cash flow is up, and accounts receivables are dramatically down.

We also like that every credit approval comes with a credit line of at least $5,000 with a majority of our patients receiving $12,000 to spend at our practice.”

Richardson also suggests that a simple welcome letter could help overcome the money objection that is such a common refrain in dental offices.

When patients check in at your registration desk, receiving a welcome letter lets them know, up front, what the acceptable payment methods are. Patient financing makes it possible for more patients to achieve the dental health and cosmetic services they desire. Several patient-finance companies provide a template for this welcome letter and may even offer to customize it with your practice information. Simply attach your welcome letter to the clipboard with other paperwork for the patient when checking in. The letter should communicate all acceptable payment methods, state your policy with filing insurance on their behalf, and include the offer of attractive no-interest payment plans.

When patients are given the full cost for their elective dental procedure, they often leave the dentist office with only
that lump sum payment in mind. The way financing options are presented to a patient, however, can often determine whether they will continue with dental care.

In addition to the welcome letter, Richardson suggests having a consistent and simple system in place to explain financing. Discussing down payments, interest rates, and monthly installments can be so daunting, some patients may simply walk away from care. It’s important to present financing options to your patients in a clear, easy-to-follow manner to help alleviate their stress and help increase case acceptance. “The ChaseHealthAdvance Payment Options Worksheet,” explains Richardson, “is one way to present financing options in an upfront, organized way that is easy to understand and helps patients see the affordability of moving ahead with treatment.”

CONCLUSION

Successful treatment acceptance is critical for increasing practice production and having a more rewarding and fulfilling business.

Converting more prospects into paying patients is a learned skill, with the proper knowledge, tools, and with practice. Presenting cases effectively and consistently, though, will fill your team with satisfaction and motivation—especially when they see happy patients return.

Finally, consider joining the most passionate and committed dental practitioners as a member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD). The AACD is dedicated to advancing excellence in the art and science of cosmetic dentistry and encouraging the highest standards of ethical conduct and responsible patient care. The AACD fulfills its mission by offering superior educational opportunities; promoting and supporting a respected Accreditation credential; serving as a user-friendly and inviting forum for the creative exchange of knowledge and ideas; and providing accurate and useful information to the public and the profession. For more information, or to join today, visit www.AACD.com.