

VIEW FROM THE PRACTICE

WHY PATIENTS DECLINE TREATMENT

Continuing on from last month, Rahul Doshi looks at the real reasons why patients may not want to go ahead with dental advice

Surprisingly, as mentioned in my last column, most of the overcoming factors to why patients would say no to treatment, are very often achieved without thought and consideration. However, I do feel that highlighting the true reasons can make treatment recommendations that much more accepted.

The core reasons of why anyone would not be happy to pay for something that should be significantly important is because of lack of trust, urgency and value. This may sound simplistic; however, by not addressing these issues your patients will continue to decline your treatment solutions. Also, they will use the untrue reasons as to why they should defer their treatment.

LACK OF URGENCY

If patients do not perceive any urgency to their treatment they will prefer to delay or not have the treatment at all. There may be several reasons for this:

- They have no pain and believe in the old adage 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'
- The problem has been there for some time with no pain
- They perceive no benefits of the treatment.

Lack of urgency often springs from lack of understanding as to why it is so important not to leave a deteriorating mouth. If patients were shown the urgency of the treatment or the benefits the treatment would provide, then it would make caring for their oral health much easier. Once the urgency of the problem is established all of the other objections are overcome.

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LACK OF TRUST

Years ago dentistry was considered by the public to be one of the trustworthiest professions. Unfortunately, recent surveys of public opinion have indicated that this attitude has largely shifted. Whatever the reasons for this change, it has left dentists fighting an uphill battle when it comes to case acceptance.

Trust is the foundation of the dentist/patient relationship without which case acceptance is almost always hindered. If patients hold you in high regard, then they hardly listen to you when you are explaining treatment. They make decisions regarding their care based completely on your judgment and recommendations. Hence, trust is the foundation of helping your patients get the care they need.

LACK OF VALUE

This is often the key reason, especially in today's poor financial environment, why a patient would say no to your recommendations. In this day and age, it is all about value for money or getting more for the perceived value of the treatment or service than you expected. Adding value translates to exceeding patients' expectations in your practice.

BUILDING TRUST, URGENCY AND VALUE

Each and every case presentation should be structured in a way that will build trust, urgency and value for the patient. Every patient who currently accepts treatment from you is already displaying a level of trust and urgency. The key is to understand that at every level of communication you must be building layers of value and helping the patient to see the benefits of commencing with treatment.

Often, this can be done by involving the patient in the entire experience from the first pre-clinical discussions to understanding the reasoning behind your advice. If patients feel that they are involved in this co-diagnosis then they are more likely to develop the



urgency and trust in your recommendations. Value is then simply the way that they experience the dentistry in your practice. It then falls into the realms of being able to treat people as well as teeth. This is all about effective communication skills.

However, one thing to understand is that these factors do not work in isolation. They need to be leveraging each other to form a complete perception and experience by the patient. Therefore, it is absolutely important that all three elements are given precedence in any pre-clinical, clinical and post-clinical discussions and evaluations. This forms the essence of co-diagnosis and co-discovery. Advice and treatment recommendations then become more relevant and appropriate. This is how treatment plans are more readily accepted.

A premium practice must establish ways in which each aspect can be addressed and leveraged optimally. The best way of achieving this is via constructive systems and operational strategies. This allows the team to build by adding value, developing trust and creating the urgency into your everyday practice.

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