

PATIENT RETENTION

MEMBER ARTICLE | BY PAMELA GOODMAN, MAADOM



Is your patient retention rate stunting your practice's growth? Are you "wowing" your patients when they come to their first visit (and each one thereafter?) Does your staff do anything to retain them and make them feel special?

THE FIRST CONTACT

Patient retention begins with the first phone call. It is the first "buy-in" from your patient. Yes, they are a consumer and are purchasing a service. But if it does not start off happy and complete, the appointment is more likely to be a cancellation, no-show, or the patient begins a hesitant relationship on the judgmental side right from the start.

Train your office staff to answer the phone with a smile and upbeat voice. When done correctly, you can feel the smile on the other end of the line. This call is every patient's first impression of your office. Are you asking too many questions, or just enough to get all the information you need? Don't overwhelm the caller. The person answering the phone should be knowledgeable and informative. The caller should feel "welcomed" before even entering

your practice. Train your team so everyone addresses the patient by name several times throughout the call.

THE FIRST VISIT

When a patient arrives for their first appointment, are they greeted as they walk in the door? Have the front office address them by name and introduce themselves. New or returning patient paperwork should be sent to them in advance for an easy transition.

Give your new patient a tour of your office before being seated. This is a great time for the assistant to ask how they are feeling (any anxiety) and what their dental needs are. It's important that the procedure or exam is explained ahead of time, and always make sure the team introduces the patient to the dentist appropriately.

TREATMENT PLANNING

During the exam, have the team communicate clearly regarding the patient's health and any treatment suggested. The assistant and dentist should take



appropriate time to listen to the patient's desires or concerns. After the appointment, plan a smooth handoff. The patient should hear the same treatment plan from the hygienist, dentist, and assistant. It should be clearly communicated to the front office team for the financial planning/payment discussion. Financial discussions with the patient should happen privately in a non-rushed environment. And...of course, correct numbers should be estimated for insurance and discounts, so you don't cause confusion or a feeling of deception with the patient.

SCHEDULING

Always schedule the patient's next appointment before they leave.

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One of the most important parts of the visit is to thank them and ask if they would be willing to leave a review/share their experience online. Make it easy for them with an automated system attached to their appointment sending an invitation to your favorite review site, such as Google, Yelp, Facebook, etc.



MEET THE MEMBER

Pamela has thrived in the dental industry for over three decades and earned her MAADOM distinction in 2021. A native of Ohio, she enjoys spending time with her family and outdoors, doing things like gardening, cycling, or riding Harleys with her significant other, Phillip. She says that “building a relationship with our patients and seeing their happiness [...] is my ultimate career goal.”

FOLLOW UP

Do you have a system for follow-up patient calls? The entire team should be involved in this process. Have the providers call and follow up with the patient to see if they have any questions or concerns, or ask if there was anything they felt the office could do better to serve them. If an appointment isn't scheduled, then team members should take the time to get the next one on the books.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

What extras do you have for your patients' comfort? Things like TVs, music, or educational blogs playing in the reception or operatories goes a long way to make patients feel comfortable. Consider having a supply of bottled water or coffee available, especially if you have guests with the patient. Warm disposable towels, hot rocks, or pads for the neck and back are a nice touch.

Is your equipment and technology up-to-date? When the team is taking x-rays, scans, or pictures, it's important for them to share with the patient how the technology is working and show them the outcome. Patients are impressed with technology and it's almost always mentioned in their online review.

From time to time, have your employees sit in an operator, waiting room, or stand at the front desk to look around at what a patient sees. These areas should be clean and organized, the front desk neat, floors and equipment clean, etc. Are things like duct tape and cobwebs noticeable? It's time to address them.

FOLLOW UP

It's important that your practice has a clear system in place for contacting patients who missed or cancelled their appointment. The majority will not reschedule, and if the front desk staff doesn't have the capacity to follow up, your patient retention rate is suffers. Ultimately it stunts the growth of your practice. Provide the time for your team to follow up on these important duties.

Your patient retention rate directly relates to the sustainable growth for your practice. Get your patients back on your schedule! Stop searching for new patients and start concentrating on the ones you already have. Dive into patient retention, patient acquisition, and focus on avoiding the last-minute empty chair expense. ■



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