

COMBATING NO SHOWS... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The scheduling coordinator should also be trained to book appointments one-at-a-time. While it is tempting to schedule all necessary follow-up visits on the same day, studies have proven that this does not make patients more likely to keep them. In fact, scheduling return appointments months in advance often leads to more conflicts and cancelled appointments.

It is also important that front desk staff not refer to reminders as "confirmations." When a patient hears your team member is calling to "confirm" an appointment, it implies the appointment has not already been established, which it has. Instead, make sure all reminders remain just that, reminders.

FOLLOWING UP

When a patient cancels last minute, or fails to show up, the receptionist should call within ten minutes of the missed appointment and express concern for the patient's absence. Once the excuse is determined, the receptionist should be polite but firm in reminding the patient of your policy, the importance of the patient's oral health, and of your time.

FILLING CANCELLATIONS

A computerized scheduling system is essential to filling cancellations quickly. Computerized schedules allow users to keep a database of patients who wish to have appointments earlier than their scheduled time. That way, when someone does cancel, it scans this database, and one phone call later you have a patient scheduled for the freed time. Non-computerized scheduling tends to be more disorganized, and your team members may spend more time than necessary tracking down patients eligible for earlier appointments.

CHAIRSIDE RELATIONSHIP

Patients with trust and respect for you and your practice are much less likely to break or miss an appointment. The relationship you and the clinical team builds with your patient may have more effect on whether they show up than anything the front desk staff actually does to remind and follow through with patients.

STAYING IN SYNC

It is important that you and the clinical staff are on the same page when encouraging a patient's return visit. If the hygienist notices a problem and recommends a second appointment, but the dentist does not acknowledge and support the hygienist's suggestions, the patient begins to think the appointment may not be necessary, or worse-feels cheated. Taking a few minutes to check in with the hygienist before you approach each patient can cut back on these discrepancies. Further, when a patient hears both you and the hygienist stressing how important their upcoming procedure is to their oral health, they will be much more likely to return.

GRATITUDE AND CARE

One of the best ways to guarantee return visits and patient loyalty is to personally show appreciation for every patient. While it would be impossible to contact each patient by phone following

their appointment, consider checking in with new patients and those who may have had extensive work done.

The benefits these acts have will extend beyond ensuring appointments are honored, in developing trust, increasing satisfaction, and promoting referrals.

NO SHOW AND LATE CANCELLATION FEE

The degree of severity that dental offices implement for handling missed appointments and charging patients varies. Many dentists are reluctant to impose fees on missed or cancelled appointments because they value the relationship they have with their patients and do not want to compromise trust or loyalty by potentially offending patients. If this is a concern for you, there are ways around it.

FORGIVENESS FACTOR

You can always use your discretion with generally dependable patients, and those with reasonable excuses and apologies. For first-time offenders, explaining you do have a fee, but that you will waive it for them just this once will generally garner appreciation.

REPEAT OFFENDERS

Once a second offense occurs, it is time to take action. Send a letter explaining to your patient that due to their second missed appointment, you will have to impose a fee of X dollars, (usually \$50-\$75), to be paid before the next appointment. Remind patients that everyone loses when an appointment is missed: them, for compromising their oral health, a third party who could have benefited from an appointment during their time slot, and your practice, which has prepared especially for their visit. All letters should be phrased politely and non-threateningly, while still getting the point across.

After one becomes an offender more than twice, you should consider firing the patient or agreeing to see them on a standby basis only.

FEE INCREASES

If you are stringently opposed to charging your patients, consider this. To offset the cost of delinquent patients, you may be forced to implement yearly fee increases for all services, which serves to penalize your entire clientele for the irresponsibility of no show patients. It may make more sense to you to charge only the offender rather than everyone.

DEPOSITS, ADVANCE PAYMENT

While advance payment or requiring a deposit are often viewed as too aggressive by many dentists, it has actually become a common practice for some. People are so accustomed to providing credit card information to hold other services that you may experience less resistance than expected. Clearly, the benefits of prepaying for appointments are that they are almost never missed.

How to Convert Emergency Patients to Comprehensive Care Patients in 5 Easy Steps

by Brooke Mott¹

Does it bother you that emergency patients come in, you get them out of pain and then they fail the comp exam? How would you like to convert those emergency patients into great, new comprehensive dental patients? These are five easy steps you can follow to create more great patients for your practice.

- 1) Schedule a team meeting when you can be uninterrupted for at least one hour.
- 2) Brainstorm with your team all of the benefits of an emergency patient getting comprehensive care. Use benefits like *pain, time, money, fear, and desire to improve their appearance* - those are the 5 main objections that patients have. Make sure you figure out what is in it for the patient. Specifically - how will they benefit re: pain, time, money, fear, no desire for improvement (apathy about what you are presenting to them - they just don't care).
- 3) Take enough time to make sure that all team members understand all of the benefits to the patient. Make sure they are confident they can explain the benefits to patients easily and in the patients' language.
- 4) Role-play the conversations you will have with patients when they come in for their emergency visits. Remember, use benefits to the patient - *they will save money, they can get appointment times that are best for them, they can avoid pain because things are caught early and are smaller problems.*
- 5) Continually examine and practice this process. This is how you get patients to say **yes!** If a patient understands what is going on with them, knows they need care, or wants elective or cosmetic care, you will have a high acceptance rate. If your goal is to get patients to accept your recommendations for their care, you will have a very high level of success with this system.

Tracking and measuring is the key to getting results. Team involvement will keep the ball rolling and lead to more success with emergency patients. These steps will ultimately create more value for patients and better dental care, they will be happy to return to your office.

Brooke Mott is a practice management expert with many years experience in team training, practice operations, and patient management. Brooke's primary expertise lies in the operational efficiency of dental practices. She is a master at building relationships with patients, managing team members and external vendors. Her primary objective is always efficiency and profitability with a focus on creating systems that work in any practice situation.

COMBATING NO SHOWS... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Not all patients need be required to provide a credit card guarantee, but some dentists find that imposing this rule for non-personally referred new patients is an effective way to make sure this generally unreliable group shows up.

DEVELOPING YOUR POLICY

Choosing a strategy for handling no shows and late cancellations is a personal choice based on what is best for your practice. Whichever method you choose, making sure the policy is clear

and reiterated often to new and returning patients should help you fill the spaces left by missed appointments.

No dentist can afford the 10% loss of revenue associated with missed appointments. By applying as many tactics as you can to curb these holes, you should begin to at least minimize some dead time, thereby limiting the stress on you and your practice's overhead.

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CROMFS VISITS CARESTREAM DENTAL CONFERENCE IN ATLANTA

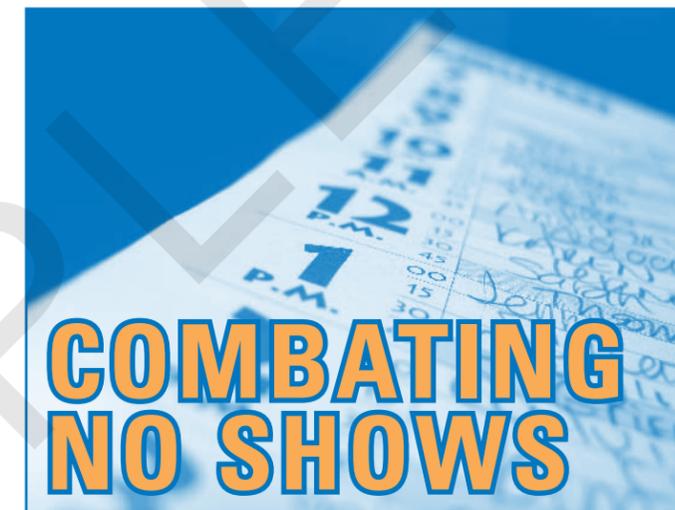


Last month, Carestream Dental hosted its annual user conference for all WinOMS users which is the software our practice uses on a daily basis. Tara, Rachel and Allie all attended the event to learn new tips and tricks along with how to use the software in the most efficient way possible. They came back with copious amounts of new information and had the chance to speak with other practices to compare and contrast office processes and procedures. They feel very confident that CROMFS is ahead of the curve when it comes to the use of EMR, capnography and the technology we have implemented in our office. We make it a priority to attend educational conferences in order to better our office procedures which help make our patient's visits a success!

\$1000 SCHOLARSHIP AWARD STATUS



We are still accepting applicants for our \$1000 Scholarship Award! All students who have a wisdom teeth procedure with CROMFS between 8/20/13 – 3/31/14 have the chance to be entered to win. One student will win. For more detailed information and rules, students can visit our Facebook page. *Good luck to all!*



You did it. You implemented a new marketing strategy and have three new patient appointments this month. Problem is, only one of them shows up for their appointment. Perhaps your new patients do show up, but you have a cancellation for a two-hour bridgework visit. Studies have shown that 1 in 10 patients miss dental appointments, and up to 1 in 8 miss teeth cleaning appointments. If this costly and frustrating experience happens to you regularly, resulting in hours of dead time every month, it may be time to rethink your patient no-show policy and how you handle new patients. In these tough economic times, making sure patients hold appointments may be more difficult-and necessary-than ever. Fortunately, there are some strategies you can employ to eliminate, or at least minimize, the toll missed appointments take on revenue.

NEW PATIENTS

Often, first-time patients are the greatest offenders when it comes to missing or cancelling appointments. To curb this problem, consider the ways you and your staff can extend greeting and welcome to new patients before they even set foot in your office.

WELCOME

First, the initial conversation patients have with the receptionist should be pleasant and informative. The very last thing the patient should hear is their appointment time repeated, and a "thank you."

You should also send a welcome packet to all new patients. It should include a thank you for their business, and some information about you, your staff, and the advantages of your office. The packet should also contain all necessary forms, and a clear explanation of your cancellation policy. This personal touch is an immediate trust-builder and will help reduce cancellations for first time patients.

CONTACT

When making a reminder call for a new patient's appointment, the caller must establish contact with the patient. Leaving a voice mail message may be effective for loyal patients, but a new one must be spoken with directly. To ensure the patient is reached, this call may have to be placed after business hours. A member of your team should be assigned to this task.

Remember: never underestimate the value of personal touch for retaining new patients.

FRONT DESK RESPONSIBILITY

SCHEDULING AND REMINDERS

Sending out postcards and making confirmation calls are important tactics that should not be abandoned. However, most dentists find that even after taking these steps, holes in the day's production still occur. Many dentists are embracing text messaging and e-mailing as an effective means for communicating a reminder to a patient. People tend to check these devices often, and direct contact is made easier than when a phone call is made. Any opportunity your team members have to make direct contact with patients should be employed to produce better results.

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