

Overcoming Patients' Concerns Through Technology



Gary Kadi

As you walk through the doors of Dr. Daniels' office, technology is prevalent. The plasma screen showing continual patient education is the first thing you see. You then make your way to the front desk, and Mary greets you with a tablet PC with PT Dental software (Paperless Technologies, gopaperlessnow.com), which allows you to check in with your fingerprint and fill out your medical history electronically. As you hand the tablet back it automatically synchronizes with DENTRIX (Dentrix Dental Systems), populating your patient information. You are offered a bottle of water as you are escorted to Leslie's hygiene room. Once there, you sit in a plush chair with a wide-screen LCD available for your viewing pleasure. Leslie hands you the wireless headphones and asks whether you want to view a movie, TV, or an old *Seinfeld* episode. During your hygiene visit, Leslie breaks out her intraoral camera. On the same screen you viewed your entertainment, you now see the pictures she has taken of your mouth.



Frank Quinn

Patients have 4 main concerns when visiting the dentist: time, money, understanding, and comfort. When used properly, the 3 technologies described in this article can eliminate these concerns.

If you have some, all, or none of these technologies, this article will explain what you need to do with the tools you have or plan to invest in. Many practices, maybe even yours, have these technologies. But, are you getting the return on your investment?

Patients have 4 main concerns when visiting the dentist: time, money, understanding, and comfort. When used properly, the 3 technologies described in this article can eliminate these concerns. And, eliminating these concerns will improve the quality of patient care, increase revenue, and decrease expenses.

TIME

Many patients say they "don't have the time to visit the dentist." When you utilize PT Dental software, however, your patients will no longer have this excuse. Upon calling into Dr. Daniels' practice, patients are given the option of filling out those time-consuming forms over the Internet in the comfort of their own homes. Then, upon entering the office for their appointment, they are presented the

tablet PC to review all the forms they filled out online. Once these forms are electronically authorized and signed using the tablet PC, the patient information synchronizes instantly with your practice management software.

So, what is Mary doing while these forms are being taken care of electronically? She is providing exceptional customer service! Since the information automatically syncs, she does not have the mad dash for data entry before the patient gets into the chair. Imagine the flow of your practice with this simple, yet powerful technology.

There are a few other key benefits to the PT Dental solution:

(1) The patient queue system decreases chaos as it tracks where each patient is in the office and how long he or she has been there. With 6 treatment rooms you can understand how important it is for Dr. Daniels' staff to know where each patient is at any moment. Furthermore, the reporting system lets Dr. Daniels know where time is being spent and provides tangible data regarding her practice efficiency. This gives critical information that points the way to which areas in the practice can be improved to create a truly great experience.

(2) Dr. Daniels has eliminated paper completely, and its high cost. Most of the fruitless time spent in the past by staff members was filing and pulling paper-based records. Staff members no longer spend valuable time chasing down paperwork, which has created a less stressful environment. Hourly rates were lost to profit-eating activities that were unproduc-

tive. PT Dental software eliminates paper and the constant hassle it causes, and allows all things in the office to be filed and stored via the patient name. Even the paperwork associated with patient referrals is completely paperless with the PT software. All data forms and files (including x-ray and intraoral images) can be sent to Dr. Daniels' associates with the click of a button.

(3) Dr. Daniels can also turn any clinical form that she currently uses into a digital form to be used with digital ink right on the tablet screen. PT Dental will launch her blank form, allowing her to complete and save it to the patient's file.

(4) All the practice forms are automatically placed into time-tracking tables that manage the updating for you. This means that once the original paperwork has been captured, staff members expend no time or energy hassling with or worrying about updating patient demographics, health history, or HIPAA forms. This is especially helpful with getting patients to complete surveys. Instead, that time is spent increasing the efficiency of Dr. Daniels' practice.

MONEY/UNDERSTANDING

The second and third barriers to overcome for most patients are money and understanding, and they are linked. Technology has certainly proven to be a valuable tool for overcoming these concerns in Dr. Daniels' office. Earlier we reviewed Leslie's use of an intraoral camera with each of her patients. In a recent

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Table. Technology Addresses Patient Concerns: Return on Investment.

	Technology	Patient Concern	Return on Investment
Practice Productivity	Paperless	Time	20 Minutes Per New Patient
Patient Comfort	Audio/Visual	Discomfort	Reduces Patient Attrition by More Than 35%
Patient Education	Intraoral	Money/Understanding	Increases Case Acceptance by More Than 50%

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study we determined that patients are 73% more likely to approve and pay for present-

ed treatment plans if they see a "tangible" reason for the services. Also, I have interviewed thousands of patients to get to the root of why they did not accept treatment.

Most practitioners think it is money, but it is actually that the patient did not understand something. The patient uses the money card as a reason not to accept. With the

use of intraoral cameras for each patient, the case acceptance in Dr. Daniels' office has risen 59%.

My philosophy is that a case is not closed until the

patient clearly understands the problem, consequence, and recommended solutions of his or her treatment. First, the patient must verbally agree that he or she wants the conditions treated. Then the patient agrees on one of the following payment options, in this order, offered one at a time: (1) a 5% courtesy discount when the treatment is paid for in full upon signing the treatment plan, (2) CareCredit interest-free financing, and (3) as a last resort 50% payment at signing the treatment plan and 50% payment before completion.

I have clients in some of the most depressed rural areas, and they close cases using this system, patients get all the care they need despite insurance, and they reap the rewards. The source of why this works everywhere was when I discovered years ago that if the patient doesn't perceive he or she has a problem, then the patient is not emotionally driven to gain a solution. Said differently, if the condition is not symptomatic, patients think you are trying to pay for your new beach house. Use the camera on every patient and at every visit, especially in hygiene, and watch your acceptance rate go through the roof. The reason—you solved the problem of patient misunderstanding.

COMFORT

The final piece of the puzzle is comfort. How many times have you waited for your car to be serviced? Auto dealership studies show that the use of entertainment technology greatly increases customer satisfaction in regard to service. We can certainly learn from this example in dental practices.

In Dr. Daniels' office they have properly implemented audio/visual technology. But, the use of this technology provides an added bonus—revenue. Each treatment room is outfitted with multiple LCD monitors. One is located at the 12 o'clock position, and the other is suspended above the patient with an ICW Elite mount (ICW Solid Support). This monitor serves 2 purposes for Dr. Daniels: (1) it displays intraoral pictures, radiographs, and cosmetic imaging, and (2) it offers enter-

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tainment for patient comfort. Patients can choose from DVDs or live television while receiving treatment, thus improving their experience. According to an ADA survey, the No. 1 reason why a patient does not return to a dental office is due to having a poor experience. A whopping 62% leave because of poor service, compared to only 14% leaving due to money.

Dr. Daniels utilizes several other A/V solutions to improve patient comfort and patient understanding:

(1) The office audio system allows the patient to choose from multiple sources of music. Since some areas of the practice are louder than others, volume controls are provided for optimal comfort. This provides the same level of relaxation most patients would hear in a spa.

(2) Dr. Daniels' practice has a significant number of pediatric patients. For these patients, multiple gaming stations are available in the waiting area. Children are offered multiple games for the Xbox or Nintendo units. This greatly reduces the anxiety for both parent and child.

(3) Dr. Daniels has trained extensively to provide quality cosmetic dentistry. With the increase in these procedures revenue has increased significantly. The key to selling patients on cosmetic dentistry is timing, not persuasion. We install a system in hygiene that educates and reminds patients of aesthetic dentistry; critical life junctures, such as odometer birthdays (29, 39, 49, 59), divorce, class reunions, etc.

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internally motivate people to look and feel good. The consistent patient education reminder that plays on the plasma screen and details the cosmetic procedures allows Dr. Daniels

to close 1 to 3 cases per month, which is her goal.

CONCLUSION

Each time a patient is scheduled to visit your office, he or

she has 4 concerns to face: time, money, discomfort, and understanding. Your ability to remove these concerns from the patient's reality will increase the likelihood of that patient

showing up, accepting treatment, prepaying, and referring others (Table). Your investment in technology can be tangible and a great place for you to invest, just like Dr. Daniels. ♦

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