Is it Worth Reactivating Patients Who Haven’t Been at Your Office For Over Five Years?

When is a patient out of your practice? Many will argue that long absent patients might still return.

I have a bookshelf of charts from the previous owner with patients who haven’t been active for more than five years.

I’ve thought about trying to activate the five- to seven-year patients but not sure how and if it’s worthwhile.

The plan was to send a letter saying something along the lines of having not seen them for a while and wanting to follow-up and make sure they’re having treatment done for whatever their treatment plan was for, or Carol (my hygienist who used to treat them) is wanting to make sure they’re being taken care of since we haven’t seen them for a while, etc.

Then a follow-up phone call.

But again, these are patients who haven’t been seen at this office for more than five years. And just as a side note, I just bought the practice nine months ago so these patients haven’t seen me. However, they might have seen the hygienists who have been here at least eight years.

Any comments, suggestions? Good and bad experiences?

Great opportunity for the pre-existing team to strut its stuff! What if you made a game of it (a little friendly competition can be a very good thing) and inspired the team to group those patients as per their relationship with them? Then set a goal for the entire team to reach as a group and maybe have a side prize for the person who reactivates the most. Definitely keeping team success and reward higher than individual... the individual prize being something fun. I bet the personal touch wows patients, many of whom still consider that office to be their dentist. You might find a superstar list worker in the process. Good luck!

If these patients have been away so long, expect a low reactivation rate, but it’s still worth a try. If a handful come back, it’ll easily cover your costs.

If these patients have not been in your practice in five years, most likely, they will need a new treatment plan. Just try to get them in for hygiene. If they have insurance, the hygiene visit might be fully covered. Then diagnose, and start the relationship anew.

You mentioned mailing a letter and following up with a phone call. Texting can be effective as well if you have that capability. You will need their cell phone numbers, of course.

No. Please. Really? Great time for your staff to waste your money trying to track these people down. Spend it on looking for new patients. I’d rather pay my staff to
walk around cold calling businesses with goodie bags than pay them to sit on the phone and try to bring in people who left us for a reason.

Mike - I hear you but by using some pretty passive techniques we have been reactivating loads; about 12 a month. There is a fair share who are insurance-transient good patients. Oxymoron me all you want, but it has been working well for us and just another prong.

Americans have become more transient than ever. Do you still have valid contact information? Most people don’t have a land line anymore, and cell phone numbers get disconnected very frequently as people can’t pay bills. They move and will not tell you, and you’d be wasting a lot of time and money sending cards or waiting for them to come in for recall scheduled six months ago.

This is another issue with balances that need to be addressed at time of service. I wish I could be FFS, full fee, paid upfront and didn’t have to deal with insurance, under payment or denials. Even better, I wish that people would still come, pay off their balances and see me after they moved far away, but I am living in a fantasyland.

I would definitely call them, I wouldn’t send out cards or letters as I think it is a waste of time and money. I would have the staff call say 30-50 a day and say a short statement like “Hello this is X from Dr. (previous dentist’s name) and new dentist, your dental office. It has been awhile since we saw you last and would love to see you again.” Mostly you will get a voicemail.

You will get some out of this, and they already have a connection to the office, which is half the battle.

We do this every so often and always get a few patients. For the little time it takes the staff to place some calls, what other marketing technique has a better return on investment? They can make a lot of phone calls in 15 minutes.
Do you guys have any idea how valuable these patients are? I would rather have these patients return than “Suzy six months.”

We had a local dental office do this to get some patient flow to a new associate dentist they hired. They sent out a letter to patients who had not been through recall in the past year, saying that they would not be seen again unless they made an appointment. We picked up about 40 of these patients. Most said they were just “upset,” with the tone of the letter. So that office ended up losing patients… plus the associate after one year. So I would not use punishments.

Again… we have done it with calls, with Sandy Pardue’s reactivation program and with Sendoutcards (SOC). Because we get money back by using SOC and you have a history (including a digital copy of the card), we like that program. Plus it is easy to program and alter. It is not staff-dependent. In short, it is a custom outsourced direct mail/gift system. Because it is a birthday program… you don’t have to send out hundreds or thousands of cards at once. ■ doug