Using the Intraoral Camera: 
More Than “Show and Tell”

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The intraoral camera, although considered an old technology by many, is by far the best investment general dentists could make for their practice. This is not to say dentists couldn’t operate a successful practice without a camera, however, they can be even more successful with one.

During the introduction of the intraoral camera in the early 90s, the purpose if the camera was simply described “show and tell”. Show the patients their dental problems and tell them what to do to fix it. This technique, although quite successful in the short run, virtually intimidated the patient into accepting treatment. Unfortunately, many dental practices still haven’t realized the true advantage of intraoral photography, nor have they effectively put it to use.

The Two-Minute Treatment Presentation

The Patient Is In Control

Instead of “show and tell”, try considering how the patient’s state of mind is affected by your approach.

The four mindsets to consider are:

1. Control: All people react with some level of fear or uncertainty when they feel they have no control.
2. Emotional Buy-In: All people respond to their sub-conscious emotions. Give them positive emotions, which make them easy to communicate with.
3. Ownership: All people learn and function using the five senses. It takes time and understanding for people to accept and interpret the message.
4. Anxiety: All people require some level of anxiety to make a decision. It can be positive or negative, urgent or passive, but the force must be with you.

Technique for Increased Patient Acceptance

The hygienist or assistant should perform the initial tour of the mouth, as the patient may feel intimidated by the dentist. Hygienists and assistants are looked at more favorably as being on the patient’s side.

1. The intraoral tour leads to involvement and a feeling of control by the patient. They actually see, live on TV, the activity in their mouth. If it is on TV, it is real.
2. During the tour, compliment healthy tissue and good dentistry. Be the bearer of good news and subconsciously remain the patient’s friend. Hover over areas of concern that look bad, but do not comment. Do not freeze any pictures or say anything negative. The compliment and hovering technique will stick in the patient’s mind as, “I have a problem, can you help me?”
3. Face the patient, eye to eye, and ask them what they saw, what they might want to see again, and what they might want the doctor to look at closely. If the patient doesn’t respond, help him/her look at some things you noticed. Remember, the patient must feel in control.
4. Now, you are taking pictures at the patient’s request. Go back into the mouth and freeze images the patient is interested in, although not necessarily the most important for treatment.
5. When the dentist enters he/she must acknowledge, and preferably compliment, the staff for the pictures, and handle them first with the patient. The dentist can then casually move on to the treatment plan that is most appropriate.

It is recommended the assistant or hygienist put up a quad format on the screen and leave the pictures for the entire visit. However, when the dentist is conversing with the patient and scheduling or creating a treatment plan, the dentist must do one picture at a time. A patient cannot comfortably look at and analyze a quad screen. More often than not, patients will become confused and unsure regarding the decisions they are trying to make, resulting in no shows and cancellations.

The dentist must be clear with the patient on each procedure scheduled before moving on to the next one. The dentist must watch the patient’s eyes so the dentist can tell when the patient has had enough, or doesn’t understand. It may be necessary to stop and refocus. Time and time again, many a good paying patient has been lost or postponed because the dentist was not paying attention to the patient’s cues.

Summary

There are dozens of ways to obtain patient acceptance and none of them are wrong. Some methods work better with certain personalities than others. It is important to put the delivery into your own words because you have to believe the dentistry is in the patient’s best interest. You really want patients to enjoy their visit to your office and value the work done for them. A happy patient is the true long-term key to success of any practice, and the intraoral camera is the best tool you have to create a happy patient.

Tom Sorensen is president of Advanced Dental Technologies based in Dumont, Colorado. Advanced Dental Technologies is a specialty equipment company serving the Rocky Mountain west since 1991. Tom has nearly 30 years experience marketing high-tech equipment to medical and dental professionals, and considers training and implementation to be a most important part of any sale. For more information please contact Tom at tom@advdentik.com