

Are you sitting comfortably?...

Sixth in a series looking at ensuring a continuous monthly income



It's a no brainer: no patients – no income – no job satisfaction.

There is little doubt that, if you want to be an NHS dentist, you will have no problems acquiring and retaining patients. For the private dentist, the situation is more fragile. The patients can go elsewhere if they think the service or proposition is unacceptable. This article concentrates on the private practice.

Squeeze

The cost of acquiring new patients is high – you either buy into an existing practice or set up a new practice: either way the costs are substantial.

It is equally costly to lose existing patients; this includes the frequency of visits to the practice. This obviously means a reduced practice income.

In the current financial climate – which will worsen as the number of people out of work steadily increases – a costly visit to the dentist is viewed as a non-essential cost – and one that is easily foregone. However,

a small monthly payment is less likely to be cancelled as the household budget is squeezed.

This is part of the answer – by offering monthly paid dental health plans to your patients they will benefit from:

- the ability to spread the cost of routine dental treatment
- the best dental health through regular planned visits
- peace of mind and, typically, a discount on procedures not included in their plan.

The benefits to the practice are more obvious: a regular, and probably enhanced, monthly income and less stress.

Anecdotal information indicates that fee-per-item patients attend, on average, once every 18 months. Plan patients will attend when scheduled on the basis, 'I've paid for it so I'll have it'.

Standing back from the clinical issues, and reviewing the overall offering, is time well spent. Now is the time to make a plan on how you can benefit from the recession. We see patient numbers growing within our client base, securing their income and their patient's oral health. It is clear that many patients prefer small monthly payments.

First impressions

To retain your patients, they must leave the surgery with a feeling of having been well looked after in comfortable surroundings and having received value for money.

First impressions really count. Are your premises attractive? Are the members of staff smartly

dressed? Is your telephone answered promptly giving the practice name and the name of the staff member who answers? Is the receptionist efficient, kind and helpful?

The next part of the patient's experience is the waiting room. Is it modern, well decorated, well lit and attractively furnished? Can the patient freely obtain information about the services you offer without asking?

The most stressful part for the patient may well be the call into the surgery and sitting in the chair. As you know, putting patients at their ease is an important part of the treatment. Explaining the treatment – and how it is going to proceed and answering any of the patient's concerns – will undoubtedly help in creating a calm and relaxed atmosphere.

Can the range of treatments available to the patients be extended? Many practitioners now offer – or have set up reciprocal agreements with other providers – facial aesthetics, cosmetic dentistry, implants and orthodontic treatments.

How is the patient going to pay for the treatment? Making it as easy as possible for the patient to pay is an important part of your service. Also, perceived value for money is another key element of your offering.

Having dental health plans in place will achieve three objectives:

- they create a regular cash flow
- they help to control the attendance of patients
- it is the best way to assure income & it will increase the value of the practice.

Check List:

Premises	Staff	Reception	Waiting room	Literature	Relaxed atmosphere	Payment	Dental health plans

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Topics coming up in Dentistry...

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