

ENDO INC

ROOT CANAL SPECIALISTS

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Why Case Presentations



by Steven J. Anderson¹

There's an insidious pathological condition in dentistry's midst. It reaches epidemic levels in every dental practice. Left unchecked and untreated, it does serious and ultimately very costly damage. But the symptoms are not at all obvious to those affected. Most reflexively deny there's anything wrong, even in the face of incontrovertible evidence and an expert diagnosis.

Adamant denial is, indeed, the immediate reaction of those who initially have the condition diagnosed. Those who refuse to recognize it will never solve it.

The above rings some bells, doesn't it? It sounds a lot like periodontal disease with proven links to such grave issues as coronary artery disease, stroke, diabetes, and arthritis.

But we're not talking about perio here. The problem in question lies in the minds and hearts of dentists and their team members, and the ways they interact with patients.

We call it Approval Addiction. Borne out of a fear of rejection, it builds rejection into communication between you and your practice team and patients. Meanwhile, it damages the performance of the practice and the professional self-esteem and fulfillment of the dentist and team. And it hurts patients, who don't get state-of-the-art dentistry for lifetime oral and general health.

There is some good news about Approval Addiction, however. You can cure it and reap the personal, professional, and financial rewards and spare yourself the pain of rejection - which hits dentistry especially hard.

Just as there is a system for treating periodontal disease, there is a system for communicating with patients at every

stage of the professional/patient relationship, from the first "Welcome to the practice" to accepting and implementing treatment plans that is the antidote for Approval Addiction:

This system is grounded in the science and psychology of how patients make treatment decisions. First, though, you've got to recognize that there is an Approval Addiction problem, which you probably have!

FIRST ENCOUNTER:

I'll never forget the first time I looked this beast in the eye. It happened about 30 years ago, at the very beginning of our work with dentists.

At the time, we consulted with businesses of all kinds and did seminars to teach principles of marketing and communication. Word-of-mouth brought a few area dentists to our seminars, which went viral in dentistry. We naturally got curious about the attractiveness of what we were doing in the dental world and arranged to do some on site observation at some dental practices.

At the end of the first day we were flabbergasted, floored! We asked each other how in the world anyone could communicate with their clientele as they did and expect to get any kind of positive results. The dentist and team were doing more to dissuade the patient than persuade. It all flew in the face of everything we knew about how consumers come to make positive buying decisions.

We knew right off where the problem lay: Fear of rejection. In an effort to spare themselves the risk of hearing "no" from the patient, accurate diagnosis and treatment plan-

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ning was being sacrificed by the dentist and the patient was walking out the door with little or no idea of what was really going in his or her mouth. The entire experience seemed to hang in limbo where the dentist wouldn't hear "No" but wouldn't get a "Yes" either, not to a treatment plan or the next appointment or pretty much anything. We'd seen the problem in business, but never at such an extreme level. Approval Addiction continues to be the number-one obstacle to success in dentistry.

LIMITING LANGUAGE, AND WORSE:

What we heard during our first dental practice visit - and still hear - was Limiting Language. In perio cases, it can go something like...

- Well, we have a little infection here.
- We might want to take a look at this sometime.
- We can watch it, and wait to see what happens.

Wrong, wrong, wrong. Hello! There is no we involved. The patient has the infection. There's nothing little about it, either. This is bad news for oral health, and ultimately health in general, no maybe involved. Watch and wait for what? Unless you do something, there's nothing to see but things getting worse.

Patients need to know the whole truth so dentists can treat their problems and keep them healthy. But the practitioner shies away from telling the truth in clear ways that call for action. Why? Because patients don't like hearing it, and dentists want to be liked.

The feelings here cut very deep. Even when we know it shouldn't, "No" hurts because it feels like rejection, exclusion. We are, after all, deeply social creatures. In primeval times acceptance by others meant survival. It's still key in emotional well-being.

Heard repeatedly, "No" takes a toll, and a dentist is the Mayor of Noville. Just think about the value proposition dentistry offers from the patients' point of view: You're asking them to pay you money to find problems they didn't know they had, which can cost much more money to correct. This is why people come in saying, "I just want get want my teeth cleaned." They don't want to hear about new problems. To you, this is a big "No" to clinical skill and expert care which you've spent a lifetime to perfect.

Then there are the words dentistry uses to describe treatment. Take, for instance, "scaling and root planing," things only done to fish and wooden boards. Or - a favorite of mine - "probing." There isn't a man or woman that hears

that word and thinks about teeth! Many times, the words dentistry uses to describe treatment make it sound worse than the condition.

THE RIGHT WORDS:

Good communication goes to the heart of Approval Addiction - literally the heart, where "No" hurts. It hurts less when you hear "Yes" more. A system of good communication makes treatment planning and presentation much easier and more comfortable because you know what you plan to say, and responses to listen for, and why. Practice team members have their own clean verbal protocols, too.

Use a good system of communication and success, however you measure it, goes up with comfort level. The power of a few words can dramatically change outcomes.

One example involves making a patient's next appointment. Using the old, ineffective way, a team member asks the patient as he or she is checking out, something like, "Well Mike, when do you want to want to come back. Would you like to schedule your next appointment?" And, 9 out of 10 times, the patient won't make the appointment.

If on the other hand, the team member asks, "I see the doctor has recommended you come back in three months.

Will this same day and time work, in 90 days?" The easy, natural answer is "Yes," isn't it? When you get it, you're doing both the patient and the practice a favor, getting treatment scheduled.

Like the above, all effective communication in the practice has a built-in presumptive response. In more consequential, higher-level exchanges - like presenting diagnoses and treatment plans - this involves preparation that begins before you do an exam, even before you say "Open."

Ask questions, and listen carefully, you will find out why the patient is in your chair and what he or she truly wants. Grasp that, and you have a receptive patient - to the whole truth about oral health and your great dentistry.

Use a proven system for communicating with your patients so you can circumvent Approval Addiction, get better case acceptance, and have more healthy patients who repeat and refer. That's a result to which everyone can say "Yes!"

Steve Anderson is the founder of Total Patient Service Institute (TOPS), which provides seminars and coaching to raise treatment acceptance. He is also a presenter, author and entrepreneur, having founded over a dozen businesses. You can contact Steve at: 1-877-399-8677 or www.TotalPatientService.com.

How to be the...

by Christine Taxin²

...FACE OF HEALTH & WELLNESS

You are the face of the business. You are the first person potential patients' encounter when considering making an appointment. You are the voice over the phone, the smile at the desk and the encourager at the other end of an e-mail. If you want to flood your office with patients excited about health and wellness, make sure you and your team knows how to make a first impression that truly represents your doctor, your practice and you.

1. *Be a problem solver:*

If you want to succeed in maximizing new patient flow, you must see yourself as more than a secretary. You are the epicenter of the practice. You must be able to multitask and problem solve, whether it be an issue with the schedule or a patient's child. No task is too big or too small, so be prepared.

2. *Know more than they think you will*

You are the hub of the office. Make sure you can answer any question that comes your way. Take pride in knowing about clinical offerings, procedures, products and insurance. If you are well-informed and helpful, patients will know they can and will be taken care of when they come to see you. Additionally, it is your responsibility to ask questions normally reserved for the medical team. Ask patients about their medical history and have a written record of their response. Your investment in the patient's health shows you are an integral part of the wellness system in the office.

3. *Be excited:*

Your energy is contagious. Smile when you answer the phone, smile when a person walks in to the office and tell each and every person you are excited they are choosing your office. It is a privilege when someone trusts you with their health, treat them that way.

4. *Be truly happy in your job:*

People can tell when you are faking it. If you have issues with co-workers, are angry about your payor feel taken advantage of by your doctor - patients will know. Check your issues at the door so you can be authentically happy during your day. Your patients will truly want to be a part of your office if they know you are sincere.

5. *Be a people person:*

Be engaging. Consider yourself the host(ess) of the office. People are uncomfortable when coming into or calling an office for the first time; it is your job to reach out and make them feel welcome. If they are coming in for the first time, look them in the eyes and tell them you are happy they are there. If they are on the phone, let them know you cannot wait to meet them. Pay attention to your tone of voice when speaking on a call. Give them your full attention. If you are distracted or flustered they will not have the experience they deserve from a wellness center.

6. *Ask questions:*

One of the most important things you can know about a new patient is

why they are coming into the office. So, ask them: "What is your most important consideration when choosing a doctor?" Write down their reason, and communicate that to the rest of the team. In addition, respect their privacy by getting permission to confirm their appointment and to remind them of paperwork to bring. You should also ask for permission to contact their medical provider (if necessary) to ensure quality collaborative treatment.

7. *Listen:*

The most important opinion in the office is the patient's. Therefore, you must know what matters to them. If it is insurance (which it often is) let them know you will help them maximize all of their benefits for treatment; both dental and medical. If you truly hear them, you will truly offer them personalized service. Make sure you document everything the patient says to you. Then, during the exam, the doctor or hygiene team can demonstrate that everything the patient says is important by stating: "I understand X is important to you, and you wanted to make sure we knew about it." This is fundamental in providing the type of care that is expected of a wellness center.

8. *Prioritize:*

Your job is hard. You wear many hats throughout the day. It is important to be able to prioritize certain things over others in order to maximize your time and office production. New patients are the lifeblood of the office; therefore nearly everything else should take a back seat when a new patient is on the phone. Research shows that the longer you are on the phone with a new patient the higher the acceptance of treatment. Figure out a way to clue the entire team in on the type of call you are taking (use a colored form, change the image on your computer screen etc.) to indicate who you are talking to and that you cannot be interrupted.

9. *Be a cheerleader:*

When patients are asking questions about services it is your job to be a cheerleader for your team. Compliment the hygiene team on their knowledge. Make sure the patient knows they have taken extra courses in order to provide the best service. Praise your doctor. Make sure the patient knows he or she is the best, and that his or her primary concern is the health and wellness of each patient. Your enthusiasm and complimentary words will stick with patients and give them the experience they desire.

10. *Be thankful:*

When it is time to get off a call or send a patient out the door, thank them. Tell them you appreciate their trust. If you are thankful, they will feel valued and be more likely to refer other patients to your practice. If they come in as a referral, be sure to thank the person who sent them to see you. There is no doubt about it, the front desk communication is critical to the success or failure of a dental wellness center. Doctors, team members and front office staff must realize its value to ensure patients get the experience they deserve when they call, email or walk into the practice.

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Intraoral Camera as an Adjunctive Diagnostic Tool? Part 2

by Patricia A. Worcester, RDH, BS³

The Intraoral camera is a huge diagnostic tool for the following dental issues:

- Food impaction leads to bone loss and root decay and is a very serious dental condition. The patient thinks if they just floss out the food, it will be fine. Now, on the big screen, they can see how inflamed the tissue is and how large the area is between the two teeth that are catching food and bacteria.
- Poorly fitting partials can be shown where the clasps do not grip the tooth causing the partial to slip while eating and talking.
- In cosmetics, the camera can show the patient their different gum heights and how gingival recontouring can change their smile design.
- In cosmetics, the patient can really see the different shape and sizes of their teeth along with rotation and overlapping of teeth. We can seriously help the patient discover what they are looking for esthetically by pointing out their existing conditions. Most patients have never really looked that closely at their teeth to notice gingival height, tooth length, width and shape. We can help engage the patient in discovering what it is they want to change in their existing smile.
- For periodontal disease, we can show the heavy calculus deposits, plaque buildup, and the red "halos" of swollen, inflamed tissues around their teeth.
- Running the probe subgingivally while working the camera helps the patient see the bleeding of their gums. And placing the probe into a deep periodontal pocket will help the patient believe they have disease because they can see the "hole" that the probe is finding in their jaw-bone. This will add confirmation to their periodontal disease and need for perio therapy. This also will reinforce the necessity of 3-month maintenance visits.
- Oral lesions can be captured on the screen for the patient to view so they understand the seriousness and/or necessity of a biopsy. Images are also viewed for comparison and documentation.

This shows the value of using the intraoral camera on all your patients. When you wait until you can see something with your naked eye, it has already advanced to a more serious level of disease. The camera can work as an early intervention device. The intraoral camera helps the clinician find problems as early as possible to prevent severe damage being done to the teeth and supporting structures. It shows the patient what we are seeing, and together we co-discover their conditions.

We also need excellent word skills to describe their conditions to them, so they can understand and move forward with both necessary and cosmetic dentistry. I hope the entire team is utilizing the intraoral camera for simple explanations about disease and to advocate treatment to further their patients' health, cosmetic needs and wants.