

The Ideal Implant Consultation

There are three phases of an ideal implant consultation:

- Phase One: Determining the Problem
- Phase Two: Presenting Possible Solutions
- Phase Three: Prescribing the Treatment Plan

The patient education flip chart was specifically designed to follow the ideal consultation format and should be utilized in every implant consultation, particularly for Phases One and Two, as it is a critical component of increasing case acceptance.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of the education process, the phases should be covered in sequence. Unfortunately, this requires some retraining for most dentists, as it is more comfortable to spend most of the consultation on Phase Three, which should actually be the shortest portion of an initial implant consultation.

Let's walk through the patient education process.

Setting Up the Proper Flow of the Consultation ***THE OUTLINE*******

Years of experience training people how to improve the effectiveness of consultations has demonstrated that just prior to the consultation; it is helpful to inform the patient of how the consultation will be conducted. This will usually insure that the patient does not ask about the cost of treatment until the end of the appointment, where they would otherwise interrupt your case presentation to discuss cost of treatment.

Why is this so important? If you discuss the cost before you increase the perceived value of treatment, patients will often make a decision based on cost. Many times they won't even pay attention to the rest of the consultation - they will have already made up their minds that implants are too expensive. Therefore, the following is strongly recommended:

Dentist (or Dental Assistant):

"The way we normally handle consultations is to discuss your primary concerns and any issues that you have about your oral health first. Then we will discuss the consequences of missing teeth and the various treatment options available to you. We will review your medical history and I (Doctor) will do an examination and clinical evaluation to determine the best treatment plan for your individual needs. I (we) will answer any questions you have about the recommendations and then I (we) will give the treatment plan information to my (our) Office Manager who will discuss appointment scheduling and financial issues and arrangements with you"

If the patient does ask about cost before you are ready to discuss fees, it generally works well to use the following.

Patient:

"How much do implants cost?"

Dentist:

"The fee for treatment is based on a number of factors which will be evaluated once I have completed the examination and reviewed the diagnostic records. I won't know what the fees are until we determine the best treatment plan for your needs. Once we decide on a treatment plan, I will have my Office Manager review the treatment sequence and financial issues with you."

After you explain the flow of the consultation process, you would proceed with the following format for the first phase of the consultation. This generally takes about 15 minutes.

Phase One: Determining the Problem

The first step is to define the problem from the patient's perspective. This is done by asking open-ended questions about what the patients have now and how they feel about their situation.

For example: "How do you feel about wearing a partial?"

"How do you feel about the appearance of your smile?"

Then you would ask the patients what they want.

For example: "If you could have any type of replacement teeth, what would you want to have?"

If the answers to the "want" question does not address the long-term, have the patient outline his/her long-term goals for health and appearance.

For example: "What are your goals for the long-term health and appearance of your teeth and smile?"

The recommended treatment plan should be perceived as a vehicle to help them replace what they have now with what they want, or solve their current problem as they perceive it. In other words:

The difference between what they have now and what they want is the problem that needs to be solved with the treatment plan.

Summarize the key points of the patients' answers to the "have" and "want" questions and clearly point out the difference between what they have and what they want.

REPEAT WHAT THEY SAY

When the problem is clearly defined, patients cannot get to the solution fast enough.

Once the problem has been defined from the patients' perspective, define the full scope of the problems associated with missing teeth, covering the following:

- The function of natural tooth roots.
- The consequences of missing teeth.
- Bone resorption
- Implants as substitute, or replacement tooth roots
- Bone preservation with implants
- The inherent weakness of some traditional methods of tooth replacement

The patient education flip chart explains these four areas with clinical photos, diagrams and copy that are easy for patients to understand. Using the flip chart is the most effective way to fully define the full scope of the problem to patients.

Page Two of the flip chart "Bone Resorption: The Ultimate Consequence of Tooth Loss"

This page illustrates very clearly how bone melts away as a result of missing teeth. This is extremely important *for* patients to understand. Otherwise they will not grasp the concept of implants preserving bone.

Page Three of the flip chart "Dental Implants: Replacement Tooth Roots"

Once the patients understand that natural tooth roots hold the bone in place, they will appreciate the value of replacement tooth roots. - dental implants. It is important for patients to understand that dental implants serve: the same functions as the missing tooth roots: preserving the integrity of the facial structures by stimulating bone growth and providing a stable foundation for proper function.

The Consequences of Tooth Loss

.You would then use the page in the flip chart that explains the consequences of tooth loss for the specific case type. There are three basic case types covered: anterior tooth loss, posterior tooth loss and complete tooth loss. These pages in the flip chart outline the specific problems with tooth loss and the weaknesses of traditional tooth replacement for each case type.

Phase Two: Presenting Possible Solutions

When the problems have been clearly defined from patients' perspective and the full scope of the consequences of missing teeth has been explained, you should proceed by presenting the benefits of implant treatment that address the primary concern and case type.

Relate the benefits of implant treatment specifically to what patients said about how they want to look or feel. Although there are many benefits of implant treatment, it is important to focus primarily on those benefits that are directly related to patients' desired outcomes.

The Benefit of Tooth Replacement with Dental Implants

Following the appropriate page in the flip chart on consequences of tooth loss, is the page on the benefits of tooth replacement. Discuss the possible treatment options, outlining the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Emphasize the primary benefit of implant treatment, preserving the integrity of facial structures. Compare this to all other methods of tooth replacement, which cannot preserve bone, or prevent the consequences of bone resorption. Understanding this will significantly increase the patients' perceived value of implant treatment.

Phase Three: Prescribing the Treatment Plan.

At this point in the consultation, the patient is anxious to determine the specific treatment plan. The examination and review of x-rays would take place at this time. The x-rays should be explained to the patient, as this can help them to understand the treatment planning process better.

Then recommend the ideal implant solution and explain the implant procedure in lay terms, without going into the details of surgery. **TMI** Describe the first phase of treatment as replacement of the roots to provide a stable foundation, and the second phase of treatment as fabrication of the new replacement teeth. Answer any questions that the patient may have. Some of the most common questions are included in an additional handout.

Once the remaining questions have been answered, reinforce that the ideal treatment recommendation is tooth replacement with implants, to preserve the integrity of facial structures by virtually stopping the bone resorption process.

Then to wrap up your portion of the consultation, introduce the Office Manager to present the fees and handle appointment scheduling.

Note if you quote fees yourself keep in mind the techniques for presenting.

To summarize the “Ideal Consultation” is structured as follows:

Introduction should include an outline of consultation so the patient can keep an open mind about what you are purposing.

Phase One: Determining the Problem

- Ask "have" and "want" questions to determine the primary concern
- Outline patients' long-term goals for health and appearance of teeth / smile
- Ask additional probing questions to clarify answers to original questions
- Summarize patients' concerns and goals
- Define the full scope of the problem: function of tooth roots, consequences of missing teeth, inherent weaknesses of traditional tooth replacement
- Review the benefits of implants that relate to primary concern

Phase Two: Presenting Possible Solutions

- Present all possible treatment options
- Compare the advantages and disadvantages of treatment options
- Relate the advantages to the patients' primary concerns

Phase Three: Prescribing the Treatment Plan

- Examination, review x-rays, diagnosis
- Explain two phases of treatment: root replacement and fabrication of replacement teeth
- Answer any remaining questions
- Introduce Office Manager to present fees and schedule appointments
- Recommend ideal treatment plan