

Beware the Implant Practice Plateau Gene

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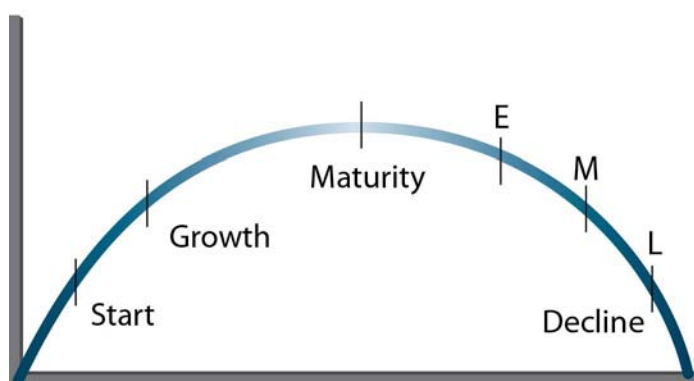
Introduction

From the day an implant office opens, it's carrying a destructive gene that will someday halt growth far short of the practice's true production potential. Regardless of the implant surgeon's clinical skills and the team's hard work, this *Implant Practice Plateau Gene* makes it virtually impossible for implant surgical practices to move beyond 200 implants a year—without taking decisive action.

Although a temporary plateau is often a natural part of an implant practice's growth cycle, many offices are now experiencing longer plateaus, which can signal an impending decline. However, with the right techniques, the Implant Plateau Gene can be neutralized.

A look at The Implant Practice Career Cycle™ will help explain the plateau phenomenon and how to overcome it.

Implant Practice Career Cycle™



The Four Stages of an Implant Practice's Development

The Implant Practice Career Cycle™ consists of four stages: Start, Growth, Maturity and Decline.

1. Start

With passion and enthusiasm (and debts to pay off), the new implant practice opens. Potential sources of referrals are courted and the schedule begins to fill up.

2. Growth

With nowhere to go but up, the implant practice begins growing steadily. Systems are implemented, valuable experience is gained and the practice's reputation grows. Prior to the recent recession, production growth could come very quickly and last for several years. In the challenging post-recession economy, growth has tended to come more slowly for implant practices.

3. Maturity

Sooner or later, the relatively rapid growth of the previous stage gives way to a more settled period, with strong referral relationships established, systems and staff working efficiently and the implant surgeon's financial future looking bright.

This is the stage when the practice becomes vulnerable to the Implant Practice Plateau Gene. Systems gradually become obsolete. Lack of training limits staff performance. Retiring referring doctors are not replaced with new referral sources. And growth slows and eventually stops.

4. Decline

There are three phases of decline, defined by the percentage of reduction in the growth rate.

- A. Early Decline** is characterized by a -4% to -8% annual reduction in implants placed. With quick and appropriate action, this problem can be solved relatively easily.
- B. Middle Decline** occurs when growth is dropping at the rate of -9% to -18%. Levin Group has found that implant practices in this phase have relied too long on their established referral base without adding new referring doctors. Unfortunately, many implant surgeons in this stage fail to realize that a crisis is about to overtake them, so they see no reason to make vital changes in their management and marketing systems. In fact, by getting expert advice and implementing a strategic plan based on proven solutions, growth can be restored without significant negative effects on profitability in the long term.
- C. Late Decline** sees production declines of -19% or more. Though reversible, this condition could seriously jeopardize any chance of future practice success or financial security for the surgeon. Levin Group has helped practices in this stage turn around, but there is no way for them to completely recoup the time and income that have been lost.

Avoiding—or Counteracting—the Implant Practice Gene

The best way to minimize the frequency and duration of plateaus—and to avoid slipping into actual decline—is to implement efficient management systems and effective marketing programs right from the start of the practice, and get into the habit of reviewing and updating them routinely. Levin Group advises implant practices to:

1. Accept the fact that you will *always* need to engage in marketing activities.

Like it or not, marketing is a necessity—not an option—for implant practices. Young implant surgeons cultivate restorative doctor referrals for a few years but stop building new relationships because the practice's systems reach the limit of their capacity—at about 200 implants a year. Once these practices plateau and begin to decline, they scramble for new referral sources. By the time new relationships are developed, the practice has often sustained serious financial damage. The only sensible approach is to maintain an active marketing program through thick and thin, using an ever-changing mix of customized strategies. As the Levin Group *Law of Business* states, *“The practice will either grow or it will decline, but it will not stay in the same place. Plateaued practices today are declining practices tomorrow.”*

2. Evaluate and update management systems regularly.

Inefficient practice management systems may not hurt the practice noticeably at first, but, as the practice grows, they begin to undermine practice potential. Apparent success can mask this problem, sometimes for as long as 10 years, but eventually there are signs of real trouble. Systemic bottlenecks reduce productivity and increase stress. Untrained staff members fall behind. As with marketing programs, it is essential to review and modernize all practice management systems—and train staff to use them properly—on a regular basis. Levin Group has found that most systems need replacement every 3–5 years to ensure continued growth and long-term profitability.

Conclusion

All implant practices have the Plateau Gene embedded in them right from the start. Practice growth through the early years may mask underlying shortcomings in management systems and marketing programs, but eventually—and especially in this post-recession economy—the problems will begin showing up as lost production. To make matters worse, many implant surgeons will believe their practice is merely flat when, in fact, it is already in decline.

The solution—best applied from the earliest days of the practice but also effective if the practice hasn't yet declined to the point of no return—is two-fold. Market consistently, using multiple strategies at all times. And update management systems regularly to eliminate bottlenecks that undermine efficiency and production. With these two principles firmly in place, an implant practice *will* neutralize the Plateau Gene and be able to move beyond the plateau to reach its true potential.

To learn how to run a more profitable, efficient and satisfying practice, visit the Levin Group Resource Center at www.levingroupimplant.com—a free online resource with tips, videos and other valuable information. You can also connect with Levin Group on Facebook and Twitter (Levin_Group).