Top 11 Tips to Increase Your Patient Referrals

By Xaña Winans

You know that your patients are important to your practice, but do you know how important? While having patients to fill the schedule is clearly a vital component, your patients can also be valuable marketing resources. In fact, patient referrals account for the majority of overall referrals and are a low-cost, high-return marketing tool.

Every time a patient calls to schedule an appointment or ask a question, comes in for an appointment or has any interaction with you and your team, there is an opportunity to market yourself and bring more implant cases to the office. And this isn’t difficult to accomplish. There are several simple, yet very effective ways to increase the likelihood of your patients sharing their great experiences with family and friends.

1. **How you answer the phone.** This is typically the first point of contact with patients and prospective patients, and how your team handles incoming phone calls could make the difference between a scheduled appointment and an empty chair. Answer promptly, answer with enthusiasm, be clear and be friendly.

2. **Informing, educating, calming.** Due to the unique specialty component of implants in your practice, some patients may be nervous or apprehensive about their upcoming procedure(s). The more information you can provide them from the beginning, including telling them what to expect and educating them on the treatment plan, the calmer and more relaxed they’ll be.

3. **Getting to the visit.** While this may seem basic to you, to them, it may not appear so simple. For patients who have never been to your office, they may not know how to get there, where to park, which door to use or something as easy as where the restroom is. Simple things that you may overlook everyday are important for patients to know and can make them feel at ease and welcome.

4. **The office itself.** When someone walks into your office, what’s the first thing that they notice? Is it full of clutter and have that ‘dentist’ smell? Or is it clean,
comfortable and welcoming with no overwhelming odor? Again, paying attention to the little details can make a huge difference.

5. **Greeting visitors.** Do your front desk team members ever come out from behind the desk? They should. When a new implant patient is scheduled, your front staff should be on high alert. When someone they don’t recognize enters the door, they should be on their feet and ready to greet.

6. **Tour and amenities.** After a friendly welcome, it’s a good idea to take the patient on a quick office tour. Have a team member show them around and tell them about your amenities. When finished, offer the patient a beverage or snack (if you offer them) and escort them to the waiting area.

7. **Waiting.** This is a crucial step. While we know it’s easy and often unaffordable to get behind in the schedule, it’s important not to leave the patient waiting. Alone. For long periods of time. If you are running behind, have a team member explain to the patient that this is rare, you sincerely apologize and ask if there is anything you can get for them. Nobody likes sitting and waiting. But sitting and waiting without anyone acknowledging the fact is even worse.

8. **Offer comforts.** After the patient arrives in the chair, don’t wait for them to ask you to turn on the TV, if they could have some headphones and a neck pillow. If you offer patient comforts, tell them what you have and ask them if they are interested in using anything.

9. **Get personal.** Patients want to feel as if their dentist knows them. The real them, not what their missing teeth say about them. Ask about their interests, their families, their jobs or hobbies and write it down in the chart. At the next appointment, you’ll earn brownie points when you ask Mary how Little Johnny’s soccer season was.

10. **Can I have your attention, please?** You need to listen and pay attention to your patients. If they’re busy telling you about their new hobby while waiting for the anesthetic to kick in and you’re checking your phone, they can get a bad taste in their mouth – and it’s not the Novocain. Be attentive and active in the conversation.

11. **Be easy to talk to and understand.** When discussing treatment options with a patient, remember that they didn’t attend dental school. It’s important to talk to patients in easy to understand language. On the same note, be approachable.
Don’t dictate their treatment. Discuss it and encourage questions. Patients will feel more at ease if you’re easy to talk to and welcome questions.

Patient referrals are necessary and must be utilized to remain competitive, especially in an implant driven practice. Your patients hold the power to send you, or not send you, referrals. It’s important that you provide them with the best experience in order to encourage them to recommend you to their friends, family, co-workers and anyone they know. Make a pledge to follow these basic tips with each and every patient and your efforts will be rewarded.

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