

# Principle Of Custom Made Office Measures And Management

by Julie Johnstone



## Your patients are leaving... why?

Maintaining faithful patients seems easy enough to accomplish, when in fact, it is the biggest obstacle dental practices face today. Over the past century dentistry has come very far, as technology has redefined the profession. In those days, there were very few certified dentists and those who were often practicing in the basement or lower level of their home. When someone had a dental concern, they only had a few dentists to choose from. Dentistry has evolved tremendously since and we can learn a lot from the personal doctor to patient relationship, and how it has changed. The roles in a dentist's office were much fewer and patients were seen only by the dentist. The result was a more personalized bond between the dentist and the patient.

This sort of relationship can be very beneficial in contemporary dentistry. Patients are still seeking this sort of relationship: people want to feel like they matter and not that they are "just a number". Patients want to be able to relate and want to feel connected with their dental care provider. Today, the average routine dental check up is with only a dental hygienist and lasts three to five minutes. Most dentists seem too busy for their patients.

Currently there are close to 9,000 dentists in Ontario alone. This means that the general public has many dentists to choose from. Thus,

if the patients are not feeling a connection to the dentist or staff, they will leave. Many practices will rely solely on their new patient report numbers, which leads them to believe that the practice is thriving because their new patient numbers are maintained. In fact, the practice should be more concerned about how many patients are leaving the practice instead.

If a dentist attracts twenty-five new patients per month but loses sixteen within the same month, in order to maintain the patient base, the dentist really gained only nine new patients.

So often this business aspect is overlooked. This problem goes unnoticed when so much money is spent on attracting new patients to the practice as opposed to maintaining existing clients. There are ways to mend this issue by integrating more personal means to your practice.

## Implement a patient survey

Give a survey to all of your current patients. Allow them to fill it out online from your company website. This will allow patients to answer discreetly and honestly. Even though it may be stressful to read reviews about your business on the Internet, it is strongly suggested that you do. You should know what has been said about your service by reading what is currently posted on the Internet. The reviews are an opportunity to learn and develop advantageously. One review said that the staff seemed to not really care and

that they seemed more interested in discussing their personal lives. This is valuable information for your practice. Read it and amend it.

By implementing a patient survey, you will learn whether you are satisfying your patients, and to what degree. You may learn from what they suggest. Let them know you care about how they feel and that you welcome any suggestions or comments regarding your services.

## Care calls

Care calls are a very personal method of keeping in touch with your patients. People love to get a call from their dentist. This is one easy way to make your patients feel special. Set time perhaps during the lunch break or in the evening to call your patients; remind them of your services and their personal health care needs. Remember you want to keep all of your patients instead of giving them away to your competition. You want to build loyalty.

If your practice has built strong relationships with your patients, they will be more open to communication. They will refer family, friends and coworkers who will help expand your business. Your patients will also feel as though they can share their honest opinions. For example, if they feel their appointments went well or not so well.

Personally attending to all of your patients may seem overwhelming; you may feel that your practice is too big. Your dental office staff needs to be trained to fully understand the importance of having your patients return to your office on an on-going basis. Your staff needs to understand the patients are the practice.

By making these small changes you are building a great foundation for your practice.

## Attracting patients to your practice. Why should potential patients choose your office? What do you offer that your competition doesn't?

Patients choose a dental practice based on the following:

1. Location
2. Convenience
3. Staff
4. Dentist

## Location

Is your location accessible and visible? Does your location offer plenty of free parking? Does your office offer a variety of hours? There are successful offices that are open from Monday to Thursday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. However, a not so successful office may be open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Obviously the first office that is opened Monday to Thursday would have a very loyal patient base. In this case the office is in full control of the schedule. In the second case, the office hours are too excessive. What happens is that the practice ends up with large overhead costs because they need to have the staff to work all of the hours, and many times they do not have enough patients to fill all the open hours. Most of the time, the schedule falls apart and the practice is left with open time that equals lost production. It is a vicious cycle. Most dentists do not like the idea of reducing the appointment schedule and feel that their staff will be able to fill the open time. What happens as a result of having too much supply and not enough demand is that your staff feels frustrated. The workday is consumed with trying to piece together the schedule. It is vital to be in control of your hours and schedule by not allowing your patients to dictate your appointment book. Offer flexible hours but work smarter not harder. Measure supply and demand. Tighten back on the hours and then, open more hours depending on your client base. This will save you money in the long run and you will make staff more functional.

## Convenience

Does your office have flexible hours? Does your office take the payment from the insurance company? Patients are looking for convenience. What can benefit them as consumers? If you know that your competition does not take assignment, it is recommended that you consider making your office "Managed Assignment" meaning that you accept payment from the insurance company; however, your staff collects the difference from the patient within the same day. This only works with very well trained staff. Your staff must completely understand that if they do not collect that difference and get a Visa or MasterCard on file; they could end up with a huge AR problem. So they are actually making their job easier by collecting the difference that same day. Having your office provide services your competitor does not will set you apart from other dental offices.

## Staff

This is a huge topic as it is imperative to have a winning team. A practice cannot afford to have any weak members on their team. A lot of practices are afraid of confrontation and so they put up with a mediocre staff. A negative staff can be detrimental to a dental practice. Negative staff can bring down the whole team. Sometimes staff is inherited when a dentist purchases a practice. Now this is a tricky situation. In most cases that staff have no idea that the practice is being sold until the transaction has already taken place. Once this happens, most staff feels betrayed and are full of questions. They also feel insecure because they are unsure of their future. They may not know the new owner. Some staff transition without any problems while others may become hostile about what has happened. As a business owner, you need to have a pulse on how your staff is performing. That is why an office manager is recommended. He/she can be a great addition to your staff; someone who works daily to strengthen your team and develop your business. Someone who can be your eyes and ears while you work.

## Dentist

As mentioned before, the relationship between the dentist and the patient has changed dramatically with the advancement of dental technology. It has become less personable. Today you must work much harder to create a bond and connection with your patient. Greeting patients by name or remembering something personal about the patient is very beneficial to the image and brand of a dentist. There are companies that provide email services and e-newsletters. The e-newsletters are customized to your practice and look as though they personally come from the dentist. This is a great way to stay in touch with patients between appointments.

*Bottom Line: This article provides helpful practice management advice to make a dental practice successful.*



### Julie Johnstone

Julie Johnstone has a wide and varied background in the dental industry and serves as a dental practice management consultant. If you would like to discuss this article with Julie with no financial obligation, please contact Julie at 905.920.3584 or visit [www.custommademarketing.ca](http://www.custommademarketing.ca).