

A new way of approaching the new patient examination

By Prime Practice

Every now and again a new way of thinking causes a paradigm shift that realigns the way people think. Often pioneers of these techniques are thought of as being wacky or misguided, but if the theory they espouse is tenable, it soon takes hold and can eventually come to define normality. One such movement is Primespeak, which is a new concept in patient communication, one founded in psychology and the nuances of patient behaviour. It incorporates a whole new way of thinking about how to communicate with patients in an ethical way, but one that encourages treatment uptake.

The philosophy of Primespeak

In a profession where 'selling' is often considered a dirty word, dentists face a dilemma in aligning their ethical status with the need to sell treatments and make profit. Primespeak is a philosophy that teaches dentists how to reconcile these two conflicting aspects.

Traditional sales techniques more often than not fail in dentistry because in sales it's often a question of numbers, ie, can you convert enough leads to sales? But this simply isn't the case in the healthcare professions, and dentists have a duty of care to do their best for every patient, not simply those who choose or can afford the optimum treatment plan. The essence of Primespeak is to encourage patients to take responsibility for their dental problems, deepening their concerns rather than simply being the supplier of solutions.

Although professional recommendation is clearly the remit of the dentist, treatment is always the patient's choice and the role of the dentist is to communicate the options, and importantly the consequences of not having treatment.

The Primespeak new patient examination protocol

As professionals, dentists should concentrate on the three-fold objectives of Primespeak areas and in so doing they will fulfil their ethical duty.

Primespeak's focus is primarily on the new patient examination as it regards this as a key influencer in creating a loyal and returning patient. Body language, eye contact (or the lack of it), interaction and objections are all factors that need to be addressed if the new patient examination is to be a successful 'first date'. Failure to meet the expectations of a new patient at this first face-to-face meeting means you run the risk of the patient sharing their bad experience, and these days sharing is likely to take place, not within a small group of close-knit friends and family, but with a wide network of friends and acquaintances via social media. Primespeak turns the traditional new patient examination protocol on its head, by focusing more time on the preclinical discussion than on the final consultation element. The philosophy is that if the preclinical discussion is conducted in the right way you can pre-empt issues and barriers before they occur and in this way by the time the consultation takes place the patient is already well on their way to making their choice. In the words of Rita McCollum from Smile Dental Care and an attendee

on Primespeak's November 2015 course held in London, 'This course turns the traditional dental examination on its head! The result of which eliminates the risk of undertreatment and it empowers both the patient and the team.'

Focus on preclinical discussion

The preclinical discussion provides an opportunity to 'scatter seeds', which the patient can pick up and start to consider subliminally whilst the examination itself is taking place. The conventional new patient examination is an information-driven approach, during which the onus is on the clinician to find out what

the patient needs. This is a process of education, recommendation and overcoming barriers. In contrast, a Primespeak new patient examination is concerned with building trust and confidence, exposing existing conditions and deepening awareness and concern. The preclinical discussion is used to build trust and rapport; dentists are encouraged to be curious and ask questions in such a way that shifts control of the discussion from the dentist, where it lies in traditional preclinical discussions, to the patient.

Adopting Primespeak methodology requires a change of mindset by the



Brett Churnin, General Manager of Client Relationships. Photograph: Jake Moss

dentist and the acceptance of some actions, which on the face of it could be considered counter-intuitive. Using a combination of metaphors and patient-friendly language, dentists who have attended the Primespeak course are now using the techniques to diffuse patient objections and en-

courage treatment uptake in their practices.

Primespeak Seminar is coming to London on the 18 November 2016!

For more details please visit www.primespeak.com DT



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