How to reach your cosmetic dentistry potential

By Roger P. Levin

Cosmetic dentistry has the potential to transform any practice. Many practices offer some esthetic and elective services, but most dentists are not maximizing their cosmetic dentistry potential.

You can have top-notch clinical skills and take the latest hands-on CE courses, but if your systems were built for a 1990s need-based office, you will have difficulty successfully integrating more cosmetic dentistry into your practice.

Based on three years of researching materials to be used in Levin Group’s Cosmetic and Elective Management and Marketing Program, we recommend practices take a comprehensive approach to cosmetic and elective success by following these action steps:

1. Update your schedule for cosmetic services
2. Expand your service mix to include more cosmetic dentistry
3. Build a great team that believes in cosmetic care
4. Educate your patients about all services you offer
5. Upgrade your customer service to achieve 95 percent or greater satisfaction levels

1. Update your schedule for cosmetic services
Every successful practice needs to operate as a well-run, efficient business that focuses on exceptional care for every patient. As practices expand their cosmetic services, systems must be updated to allow for successful integration of these services. The scheduling system is often the best place to start. Build time into your schedule for cosmetic services while patients are still highly motivated to receive treatment. Most patients want to come in as soon as possible—usually within 7-10 days after agreeing to cosmetic treatment. The longer patients have to wait, the greater the chance they will cancel the appointment. The practice has not only lost a chance to perform productive cosmetic dentistry, but the opportunity for future patient referrals is also gone.

2. Expand your service mix to include more cosmetic dentistry
Providing the right service mix will increase patient satisfaction, attract referrals and lead to greater profitability. The following questions can help in choosing a service mix that will best suit your practice:
- What elective and cosmetic services do you currently offer?
- Are patients requesting services you don’t currently offer?
- Are patients aware of all your services?
- What is the socio-economic makeup of your patient base?
- Do you see mainly children, adults or seniors?
- How will your patient population evolve in the next five to 10 years?
- Are you offering the right services to take advantage of those changes?
- Do you have many edentulous patients?
To make the most of the new cosmetic services available, create a list of five or six services you would like to offer and design a plan to implement them one at a time. When identifying and adding services to the practice, remember to include necessary marketing and diagnostic components required for each service. In addition, doctors and staff should attend continuing education courses to learn more about a prospective new service. The courses will help identify services that are truly new for your practice, rather than those that are really only small improvements on the services currently offered.

3. Build a great team that believes in cosmetic care
Dental practices are built on teamwork. Every team member contributes to the overall success of the practice. To build the best teams, dentists must place a strong emphasis on training and practice values. The more skills team members learn, the more productive the practice will be and the more they will believe in the importance of the services.

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Delegating more responsibilities to the team allows the dentist to spend more time chair-side with patients. Structured morning meetings present an ideal opportunity to train the team, review cosmetic and elective procedures, reinforce practice methodologies and focus on treatment options for the day.

Scripting is another critical training tool identified and taught by Levin Group that can be used to teach the team as well as inform patients. Scripting is a powerful technique for training team members on consistent and powerful communication. Once properly trained, the dental team has the ability to educate and motivate patients about cosmetic dentistry. Nearly every aspect of the patient experience in the practice can be documented and scripted. The more scripts a practice uses, the better trained the staff will be. Scripting allows team members to stay on the same page and provide patients with consistent messaging.

Your team must also be enthusiastic supporters of cosmetic dentistry. Just as fitness trainers in health clubs live the lifestyle they promote, your team should be a reflection of the cosmetic dentistry performed in your practice. One Levin Group client, following a consultant’s recommendation, provided free cosmetic dentistry to all 14 team members in the practice when the fees would have equaled more than $50,000. While this may seem time-consuming and expensive (it was done on days off with team members volunteering to come in,) the results have already added more than $250,000 per year.