**Four ways to increase case acceptance**

By Roger Levin, DDS

*A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.*

— Winston Churchill

Everyone wants 2009 to be a better year than 2008. Well, here’s how: improve your system for presenting treatment to patients — especially larger need-based and elective cases. When I say that to dentists at my Total Practice Success seminars, a few attendees will inevitably respond, “I’m doing everything I can, but nothing seems to work. About the same percentage of patients accept treatment year-to-year no matter what I do.”

This is when I start asking questions about their case presentations:

- Is your team involved? Do you hygienist regularly educate patients about all practice services?
- Do you emphasize patient benefits right from the get-go?
- How up-to-date are your marketing materials? Do they promote all of your services, especially cosmetic dentistry and implants?
- Do you offer flexible financial options to every patient?

As the can probably guess, the majority of the responses are in the negative. That’s because most people, including dentists, have difficulty accurately evaluating their performance. We all want to believe that we’re doing the best that we can. Of course, we often are, but sometimes we are not. Admittedly, changing can be difficult. It often takes a major event, such as the worst economy since the Great Depression, to shake us out of our complacency.

While the past several months have certainly been a wake-up call, this is no time to dwell on the negative. We’re starting a new year — a time brimming with possibilities — so, let’s focus on the one indisputable fact that I can’t emphasize enough to dentists everywhere: Your practice is the best investment you ever made.

Now is the time to re-invest in your practice by improving your system for case presentation. Levin Group helps our clients increase case acceptance with a systematized approach called Greenlight Case Presentation. These four “green light” action steps can help you do the same.

**Promote comprehensive dentistry**

Successful practices take a long-term view of patients’ oral health. Most patients are potential candidates for any number of traditional and elective procedures, yet too many practices take a shortsighted view and focus exclusively on the patients’ current needs and treatment. Yes, practices should address a patient’s immediate concerns, but there also should be a focus on lifelong dentistry that takes a comprehensive view of the patient’s future needs and wants. Unfortunately, a high percentage of dental appointments are still single-tooth treatments. Offering comprehensive care to all patients can result in a significant increase in production and profitability.

**Focus on benefits right from the start**

Dentists love the technical aspects of treatment, but most patients couldn’t care less. They just want to know how treatment will benefit them. Let’s take implants, for example. Patients want to hear how implants will improve their smile, prevent bone loss, increase their quality of life, etc. It’s not that clinical explanations should be avoided entirely, but it’s just that they should be de-emphasized. Save technical details for later in the case presentation, and keep them to a minimum unless the patient asks specific questions. Remember, patients generally have one thing in mind: “What’s in it for me?” Only by focusing on benefits can patients become truly motivated. Without motivation, it’s doubtful that patients will move forward with treatment.

**Educate patients**

Just as billion-dollar corporations run the same TV commercials repeatedly to create product awareness, a practice must also educate patients about all of its services multiple times during each and every visit. Case presentation shouldn’t be solely the doctor’s responsibility, each team member must do his or her part to educate and motivate patients about practice services. In addition, marketing materials — brochures, posters, infomercials on monitors, etc. — should be featured in patient areas throughout the practice.

**Present flexible financial options**

Practices can dramatically increase case acceptance by offering a broad array of financial options to all patients. Many doctors make the mistake of assuming which patients may or may not be able to afford certain cases. Case acceptance dramatically increases when patients see the value in the recommended treatment and are presented with a variety of flexible financial options that suit their budget. Levin Group recommends that practices use these options:

- 5 percent discount for full payment in advance for larger cases,
- credit cards,
- half upfront, half before completion of treatment,
- outside or third-party financing.

**Conclusion**

Case acceptance drives practice success. These four action steps can help you and your team get more patients to say “yes” to recommended treatment. Combat a tough economy by increasing your case acceptance and give the green light to more success in 2009!

Dental Tribune readers are entitled to receive a 20 percent courtesy on the Levin Group’s Total Practice Success seminar held for all general dentists on May 28 & 29 in Nashville. To register and receive your discount, call (888) 973-0000 and mention “Dental Tribune” or email customerservice@levingroup.com with “Dental Tribune TIPS” in the subject line.

Dr. Roger P. Levin is chairman and chief executive officer of Levin Group, the leading dental practice management firm. Levin Group provides clients with Total Practice Success, the premier comprehensive consulting solution based on the implementation of high-performance systems. A third-generation dentist, Levin is one of the profession’s most sought-after speakers, bringing his Total Practice Success Seminars to thousands of dentists and dental professionals each year.