The 60-second conversion: 
emergencies to comprehensive exams

By Sally McKenzie, CMC

In stressful situations, people don’t necessarily remember what you did but rather how you made them feel. When managing an emergency patient, that point couldn’t be truer. Take steps to ensure that your emergency patients feel good about your staff, your care and their decision to choose your practice and you’ll find you’re well within striking distance of that much desired 80 percent conversion rate.

Send the right message

Oftentimes, emergency appointments are viewed as negative and potentially problematic by both the patient and the staff. Consequently, practices commonly send the wrong message to those patients that they must interact with under emergency pressure. The person is squeezed into an already full schedule. Although it’s probably not intentional, this patient is frequently viewed as an annoyance, an interruption to the day rather than an opportunity. In addition, that message comes through loud and clear to the patient.

Start with a little sensitivity training for those on the front lines. Business staff, who tend to be more task-oriented and are much more comfortable when the day runs according to a specific plan, occasionally need to be reminded that emergency patients are likely to require more empathy and concern than they may typically convey in their day-to-day patient communication. The emergency patient should feel that your practice is one that is understanding and helpful, not punitive.

Listen to how the emergency patient calls are handled. Are these conversations warm and welcoming? What is the staff member’s reaction? Irritation? Frustration? Does it depend on the time of day? How would you feel if you were an emergency patient calling your office? Would you be glad you chose this practice or would you feel that the practice’s primary concern is the payment rather than the patient?

Here’s what happens in many offices. The scheduling coordinator takes the call and scans the already full schedule. With a labored sigh, she/he tells the patient it’s going to be very difficult for the practice to work them in, but they will. Oh, and the dentist expects payment upfront, she/he adds. Within the first 60 seconds of contact with the emergency patient, your practice is laying the groundwork for conversion to a comprehensive exam ... or not, as the case may be.

Develop and use ‘emergency phone scripts

I recommend that dental teams develop phone scripts to help them effectively communicate with emergency patients from the very first word. The script provides a general guide to assist all staff, no matter who picks up the phone, in gathering necessary information, conveying essential details and continuously expressing a helpful, caring tone and attitude throughout the exchange.

Emergency patients must be treated with compassion and understanding no matter what the circumstances — full schedule, stressful situations, etc. Believe me, I know this can be tough for your highly task-oriented and incredibly efficient office manager who is lightening fast on the computer and can spit out production, collections and accounts receivables figures with pinpoint accuracy a sharpshooter would envy. But this is when she/he is going to need additional care and treatment, but for whatever reason (fear, time, finances, procrastination) she/he simply kept putting off the inevitable. However, things have changed. The patient’s situation has prompted her/him to consider not only immediate treatment, but quite possibly, comprehensive care as well. Unfortunately, dental teams miss this opportunity time after time.

Develop a plan to seize the “teaching moments” that emergency cases present. For starters, pay attention to cues the patient is giving. When managing an emergency patient, the business staff welcomes and greets them with a smile. They assure the patients that the clinical team is excellent and they will take very good care of them. In addition, they give the patients a general idea of how long their wait will be. They ask if the patients would like assistance completing their paperwork. If the patients are in considerable discomfort, they take them into a consultation room or other quiet area where a staff member can help them complete practice medical forms and other documents. The focus should be on making the process as easy and comfortable as possible for the patients.

Seize the ‘teaching moments’

As the ancient proverb says, the teacher appears when the student is ready. When it comes to emergency patients, he prepared for the “teaching moments” that lie ahead. Up until this moment, the emergency patient may not have been interested in what you and your practice had to offer. Perhaps this is one of those patients who has known for quite some time that she was going to need additional care and treatment, but for whatever reason he/she was standing no matter what the circumstances. For starters, pay attention to cues the patient is giving. When managing an emergency patient, the business staff welcomes and greets them with a smile. They assure the patients that the clinical team is excellent and they will take very good care of them. In addition, they give the patients a general idea of how long their wait will be. They ask if the patients would like assistance completing their paperwork. If the patients are in considerable discomfort, they take them into a consultation room or other quiet area where a staff member can help them complete practice medical forms and other documents. The focus should be on making the process as easy and comfortable as possible for the patients.

...are you curious?
Just because the economy is unstable does not mean that your practice has to be.

LVI will steer you in the right direction!

Now is the time to take the driver's seat and invest in yourself and your future.
Recession-proof your practice with an education from LVI.
Bring a new enthusiasm to yourself, your practice, your team, and your patients!
You can have the practice of your dreams, and we can show you how.

San Jose, CA  May 1-2  Duluth, MN  June 5-6
Palm Springs, CA  May 1-2  Sacramento, CA  June 5-6
Nashville, TN  May 1-2  Santa Fe, NM  June 5-6
Amarillo, TX  May 15-16  Marin County, CA  June 6-20
Dublin, CA  May 15-16  Chicago, IL  June 26-27
Charleston, SC  May 15-16  Temecula, CA  June 26-27
Richland, WA  May 29-30  San Mateo, CA  June 26-27
Buffalo, NY  May 29-30  Grand Rapids, MI  July 17-18
Athens, GA  June 5-6  Springfield, IL  August 28-29
Vancouver, Canada  June 5-6  Scottsdale, AZ  August 28-29
Oak Brook, IL  September 11-12
Denver, CO  September 11-12
Omaha, NE  September 18-19
Ventura, CA  October 2-3
Coeur d'Alene, ID  October 2-3
Pittsburgh, PA  October 2-3
Fort Wayne, IN  October 16-17
Springfield, MO  October 16-17
Cambridge, MA  October 23-24
Stevens Point, WI  October 23-24

LVI is bringing 11 CE credits TO YOU with a regional event in your area!

For Complete details visit www.LVIRegionalEvents.com, or call 888.584.3237
issues that will need to be addressed in order for the patient to consider further care.

Does the patient appear anxious or fearful? Does he comment that he is concerned about the cost of the treatment or the pain or the time the procedure is going to require? Is she apologizing because it’s been such a long time since she’s been in for an appointment? Did he have a negative dental experience in the past? Is she angry or frustrated? When talking to the patient, the assistant should be able to identify the most likely obstacles the dental team will encounter when encouraging this patient to pursue comprehensive care.

Track the most common reasons why emergency patients wait until there is a problem before coming into the practice. From there, the team can develop a patient communication strategy via the use of scripts and educational materials to overcome those barriers.

Develop and use patient scripts

Just as scripts are essential at the front desk when answering phones, they are also critical when educating patients about the value of ongoing dental care. Moreover, they are also critical when educating patients about the value of ongoing care.

The doctor and team should work together to fine-tune the documents over time and to develop an easy and natural flow. Once you feel confident in using those, create a few more.

‘Close the deal’

Be sure to take time to “close the deal.” After the treatment, escort the patient to the front desk and gently impress upon her/him once again the importance of ongoing care. Explain to the scheduling coordinator that the patient needs an appointment for a comprehensive exam. Time should be set aside in the schedule to allow emergency patients to be scheduled for comprehensive exams within the next week.

That evening or the next, the dentist follows up with a phone call to check on the patient and express appreciation for the opportunity to take care of her/him. Shortly thereafter, the patient should receive a new patient packet in the mail with printed information about your practice and your services along with a handwritten note from the dentist’s assistant that expresses concern for the patient’s wellbeing, and indicates that the staff is looking forward to seeing the patient again for the comprehensive exam on the designated date.

Seize the teaching moments and watch your conversion rate increase significantly.

About the author

Sally McKenzie is CEO of McKenzie Management, which provides success-proven management solutions to dentistry nationwide. She is also editor of The Dentists Network Newsletter, www.thedentistsnetwork.net; e-Management Newsletter from www.mckenziegmt.com; and ‘The New Dentist’ magazine, www.thenewdentist.net. She can be reached at (877) 777.6151 or sallymck@mckenziemgmt.com.

INTRODUCING

BeautiBond™

The Science Behind the Bond.

BeautiBond™

One Adhesive: Two Powerful Monomers!

- Unique dual adhesive monomers deliver equal bond strength to enamel and dentin
- Single coat for shorter working time
- Only 5µm film thickness

Providing convenience and efficacy in a single adhesive, BeautiBond has a distinct advantage over other seventh-generation adhesives. With bond strengths similar to leading sixth-generation alternatives, BeautiBond is the one-step, self-etch adhesive for a wide range of clinical indications. Its dual adhesive monomers enable predictable long-term bonding to both enamel and dentin.

Visit www.shofu.com or call 800.827.4638

“BONUS: 10 FREE included in package”