Treatment acceptance: Creating the buzz

By Sally McKenzie

It’s one thing to provide superior dentistry. It’s another for patients and staff to talk about it, to “create a buzz.”

Create a what?

That would be the all too common refrain in all-too-many dental offices. Sure, lots of practices provide quality care. Lots of teams from coast to coast are friendly. The majority of dentists are quite competent. But nice and competent alone do not improve a practice’s bottom line.

Most patients trot in for a dental appointment about every six months and aside from a daily spin with the electric toothbrush, they’re not giving more than a passing thought to dental care opportunities. Maybe they look at their smile and wish it could be brighter, but settle for dull. Maybe they envy their colleague’s new veneers, but assume their dentist doesn’t offer that. Perhaps they look at their mouthful of black fillings and blue-lined crowns that they’ve had for years and years and simply assume that’s still the best available.

Patients do not know what their dental options are because practices don’t take the time to educate them. Or, dental teams are so afraid their efforts to inform will be misconstrued as “selling” that they settle for treatment acceptance nowhere near the 85% benchmark.

Create a buzz! In other words, start greater case acceptance. Start by maximizing the opportunities you have to communicate with patients. Collect e-mail addresses and develop a quarterly newsletter designed to educate and inform patients about practice services. Spotlight a specific topic, such as implants or veneers, and feature it in the newsletter. Include information, such as, what implants are or what veneers are. Explain what types of patients make good candidates for the procedures, time involved, special considerations, etc. In another issue, feature treatment financing options, such as CareCredit. In another, feature a specific case showing before- and after photos. Keep copies of the quarterly newsletter at the front desk for patients to pick up and read while they are waiting or take with them when they leave.

Use appointment confirmation mailings to create a buzz. Rather than sending the extremely low quality preprinted reminder postcards, some of which come complete with grammatical errors, send a professionally designed appointment correspondence in an envelope. Include information about a service the practice offers that might appeal to the patient, such as composite restorations, whitening, veneers, or anterior splints, etc.

Create a buzz about routine staff accomplishments. Keep an 8.5 x 11 frame at the front desk. Each month, insert a new information sheet about a practice or staff accomplishment. For example, “Dr. Vann recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of her certification from the American Association of Cosmetic Dentistry.” Or “Dr. Vann and her staff will be visiting Pleasant Park Elementary School Feb. 5 as part of National Children’s Dental Health Month.” Or “Please join us in congratulating our hygienist, Ann, for completion of continuing education in the area of Advances in Periodontal Treatment.”

Make sure the buzz carries over to your team, as well. Each employee should be well-versed and prepared to answer basic patient questions about services and do so with enthusiasm. If Mrs. Carter leans over and in hushed tones asks your Scheduling Coordinator if she’d ever consider having implants, she should be prepared to answer with an enthusiastic “absolutely.” Then go on to tell Mrs. Carter precisely why she wouldn’t hesitate to have doctor perform the procedure.

In addition, each staff member should be advocates for practice and the doctor. If they don’t believe that the quality of care merits such an enthusiastic endorsement, they probably don’t belong in the practice. Sustain the buzz each day with close attention to the smallest task alone do not improve a practice’s bottom line.

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