Conscious sedation: building upon an inherent trust in dentists

By Robin Goodman, Group Editor

According to the most recent Gallop poll figures available (2006), dentistry is considered to be one of the most honest and ethical professions. While nurses are at the top of the list, dentistry ranks among the top five: nurses, pharmacists, veterinarians, medical doctors and dentists.

Patients implicitly trust their dentists, which makes dentists the best resource for patients to learn about how oral health affects overall health. Given the abundant messages over the last few years of how oral health greatly affects systemic health, one would hope that this knowledge would encourage patients to visit their dentists more often. So are patients listening?

If one considers that among adults in the United States as many as 75 percent experience dental fear ranging from mild to severe, it is clear that many aren’t even making it across the threshold of dental practice doors. Further, anywhere from five to 10 percent among this group have what is called dental phobia, a condition that causes them to avoid visiting the dentist at all costs.

In fact, a recent survey published by the Academy of General Dentistry showed that a whopping 31 percent of baby boomers never go to the dentist or only do so in an emergency. The survey, conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International (ORCI), queried 1,000 American adults in private households. If one considers that the baby boomer population is some 76 million strong, a mere 31 percent of that represents an astounding number of patients that dentists have yet to meet.

It’s not always the dentists themselves that these patients fear, it’s also the procedures the dentists perform and the instruments they use. A fear of needles or the sound of the dental drill, as well as difficulty becoming numb can compound the anxiety that keeps these patients from seeking a dentist’s care. Of course, invasive procedures, such as oral surgery, tend to cause more fear than less invasive ones like prophylaxis. So how can a dentist encourage this large segment of the population not currently seeking care to set foot into his or her practice?

First, a dentist can build upon the trust that patients inherently have by educating them about oral conscious sedation. A properly trained dentist can reassure his or her patients that oral sedation treatment can help them overcome their fears and anxiety by creating a calming, relaxing and safe dental experience.

Informing patients of the numerous other benefits of oral sedation is also helpful — such as enabling the dentist to complete more dentistry in a single visit, reducing postoperative pain, and leaving patients with little to no memory of their treatment due to the amnesic effects of many of the medications.

Having an appropriately trained team, both business and clinical, also facilitates the process by building trust and rapport with the patients. This aids in developing the long-term, trust-based, doctor-patient relationships necessary for helping patients complete full treatment plans.

Oral sedation dentistry has the ability to help millions of fearful patients currently avoiding care. The trust is already there, it is simply up to each individual dentist to build upon it.

For more information about oral sedation dentistry, visit DOCSeducation.org or call (877) 325-3627.