Trust in uncertain times

Changing our behaviour and creating a high-trust environment in the workplace, leads to greater productivity and will help to retain and attract patients, says Dr Elaine Halley

D uring these months of economic instability, it is useful to become familiar with the operations of a dental practice. This is especially important if your patients generally have a much higher level of trust with us as they return to visit the hygiene department and receive dentistry, there is time for a relationship to develop. New patients however, do not yet have that level of trust, although there are significant steps that can be taken to speed up the time it takes to develop trust. This is particularly important if your patients come to you for single courses of treatment, for example, cosmetics or implants, and there may not be time to build up a rapport over many visits.

Benefits of trust

Individuals who demonstrate both integrity and intention of purpose do so by means of the following behaviours: speaking truth, respecting others, transparency, making restitution when mistakes are made and showing loyalty. Nobility is perfect, and in dentistry as well as all walks of life, despite the best intentions, mistakes will be made. A trustworthy team or individual will own up to the mistake and apologise and go some way towards righting the wrong. They will not try to cover up mistakes or blame others accountable. In the dental profession, we have a requirement to continually update our professional development, and it can be useful to communicate our commitment to education to our patients. For example, in furthering our skills in cosmetic dentistry, we can demonstrate commitment to competency and excellence by joining the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and pursuing the Accreditation pathway. Further training that measures our results against high standards is an excellent tool to not only improve our clinical skills but also build trust with our patients.

Winning over cynics

There’s a lot we can learn when it comes to building trust with our patients. For example, in case presentation – having examples of our own before-and-after photographs can show how we deliver results. In the same way, testimonials from happy patients provide evidence of our capability and results. This is the fastest way to win over cynics. Clarifying the expectations of our patients lends itself to have a chance of being able to meet them. And don’t forget, seek first to understand before being understood. In other words, take the time to listen first. This is exactly what we do when we are diagnosing. If we didn’t first listen to the symptoms and expectations of our patients, we would be in danger of misdiagnosing.

Staying committed

The final two behaviours identified in trustworthy individuals, are those of making and keeping commitments, and extending trust to others. Making and keeping commitments no matter how small, is a measure of whether or not you can be counted on. An individual who is overly distrustful can waste a lot of energy double-checking and being suspicious, and this in turn will reduce the trust that is extended to them.

About the author

Dr Elaine Halley

qualiﬁed from the University of Edinburgh and has been clinically practicing dentistry since 1992. She set up her practice, Cherrybank Dental Spa in Perth, Scotland, in 1995. She lectures on subjects ranging from clinical excellence, to leadership and practice management. Her blend of experience combined with her own leadership in the UK dental community commend her as a proven dental professional with timely insights into the day-to-day and fiscal operations of a dental practice. Visit www.westenddentist.com.

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