What worries patients about dentistry

Ernestine Wright, managing director of Breathe Business, draws on her years of experience to provide the questions behind the eyes of the patient.

As dentists and members of the practice support team, we tend to naturally believe that cost is the primary reason that patients don’t choose to see us or to take up our treatment plans. This assumption is wrong. The three top factors consistently cited in not visiting the dentist are, in order of popularity:

1. Fear
2. Time
3. Money

We frequently discuss this situation with Breathe clients and look at strategies for overcoming the objections from patients.

The purpose of bringing awareness of what worries patients about dentistry is to develop a client experience that overcomes their fears and provides them with the reassurance and information they require, ideally before they even need to ask.

If the dentists and the reception team are consistently warm, caring, confident and knowledgeable, and the client has developed a rapport and trust with them, then the client is much more likely to accept the treatment they are recommending because they see the dental staff as trusted advisers. Furthermore, this confidence will mean the client will return to that practice and recommend it to others.

An important distinction to make is between the issue of cost and the issue of money. Many patients are less concerned about the overall cost of the treatment, than how they can pay for the treatment and when. Everyone on the team should be confident about what the practice offers (including the fees) as this makes a considerable difference to how your patients perceive you and trust you.

There are a variety of reasons why patients worry about dentistry:

- Finding the practice for the first time
- Parking
- Being reprimanded
- Meeting the dentist
- The equipment
- The instructions
- The drill
- Having injections
- What will be done?
- Why is the treatment needed?
- Appointment times
- Will I have to wait?
- How the practice is organised
- Will I be at work afterwards?
- Lying down in front of unfamiliar people
- Fingers and instruments in the mouth
- Being unable to speak clearly
- Having to spit in front of someone else
- Will I be embarrassed?
- How long will it take?
- When do I pay?
- How do I pay?
- How much will it be in total?
- Will I look odd afterwards?
- Will I be able to chew?

Over time, our clients have built a comprehensive, detailed list of what worries patients about dentistry and here is a summary of that list, in order of popularity:

- Will it hurt at the time?
- Will it hurt afterwards?
- Finding the practice for the first time
- Parking
- Being reprimanded
- Meeting the dentist
- The equipment
- The instructions
- The drill
- Having injections
- What will be done?
- Why is the treatment needed?
- Appointment times
- Will I have to wait?
- How the practice is organised
- Will I be at work afterwards?
- Lying down in front of unfamiliar people
- Fingers and instruments in the mouth
- Being unable to speak clearly
- Having to spit in front of someone else
- Will I be embarrassed?
- How long will it take?
- When do I pay?
- How do I pay?
- How much will it be in total?
- Will I look odd afterwards?
- Will I be able to chew?

About the author

Ernestine Wright is a founding partner and managing director of Breathe Business. She draws on her years of experience in the corporate world as a senior director for Reuters. She helped Reuters set up a joint venture with Dow Jones, running their UK business. With a background in marketing and sales, she has set up and led successful business teams across three continents. Ernestine specialises in coaching dentists and their teams on leadership, sales and marketing as well as building high performing teams. If you would like to know more about how Breathe can help you develop the right client experience for your practice or you can get more patients saying yes to new patient consultations and treatment plans, then please contact us at: Breathe Business 0843 209 7290; email: info@now-breathe.co.uk