We all have been suffering and seen our neighbours suffering from the effects of the economic downturn, but what keeps your patients coming back to you for more treatment?

Invest in communication training for the whole team
Many dentists concentrate on the high-production dentistry – smile rejuvenation, full-mouth rehabilitation, implants and sinus lifts and so on, but what about when the money dries up and the patients drop off the radar?

I have found it is often the simple things that keep your patients coming back for more. These are sometimes the things that we forget about with the day-to-day chaos of running a practice, but these are the things that will stick in your patient’s minds and make the difference to whether they return to you or not; in fact, it is customer service and the smiles and personal touches you display, that will keep your patients coming back to you for more.

Keys tips for patient satisfaction

Don’t keep your patients waiting
We all hate to be kept waiting. Queues, call waiting, automated answering services – I can’t think of one person who relishes any of the above. Patient surveys show that no more than 10 minutes waiting time is acceptable. No excuses. Learn to manage your time effectively and book realistic appointment times.

Take time to get to know your patients
Greeting someone by name, even though you have not met them before, remembering where they went on holiday or what their children’s names are in age order, are all ways in which you can build rapport and get to know your patient. If you show your patient you care not just about their teeth, but them too, it will inevitably lead to them coming back to you for more.

Don’t cancel or chop and change your patients’ appointments
We all hate being mucked around, especially at the last minute. If you have to change an appointment, make sure you stick by your own rules and allow enough notice and try to avoid at all costs.

Roll out the red carpet every time a patient visits you
Ever been to a salon or hotel where they have something so cool and thoughtful on tap and complimentary that it blew you away? It could be something as simple as having cool, fresh water available in an iced jug on a hot day, a warm hot towel available to freshen up after a long treatment or an unexpected call the following day just to check how you’re doing after your root canal treatment.

These are all examples of going that extra mile to make your patients comfortable and making them feel wanted and needed. Don’t underestimate these small touches; they go a long, long, way.

Don’t fine your patients for non-attendance
In my experience, fining patients for non-attendance alienates patients – you can bet your bottom dollar they will not return quickly! Instead, create value for the treatment they are about to receive.

Create value!
Once you have created value, you should have no problems collecting deposits to secure their next appointment. It is a darn sight easier to retain a deposit than collect a fee for something the patient has not had done yet.

CQC Tip: Outcome 1 of a long list of care quality outcomes is that dental teams will have to demonstrate how they respect and involve the people who use their services, ie patients!

About the author
Seema Sharma is the founder of Dentabyte.co.uk, which provides practice management and core CPD courses for all dentists and practice managers, in private or NHS practice. She has also established a philanthropic charity, The Sharma Foundation. For practice management and CQC support, email info@dentabyte.co.uk or visit Website: Dentabyte.co.uk.

If you would like to know more about her humanitarian efforts, email info@seemasharma.co.uk.