Planning a referral event

Holding a well-planned referral evening is a perfect way to introduce your team and your services to other dentists in your local area, says Dr Dattani who offers some advice

When referring patients on to another practice, any professional practitioner has to be sure that the high standards they provide their patients will be maintained and that the whole process will be seamless and as uneventful as possible. This is especially important if the patient in question has built up a relationship with their regular dentist, as they may be unwilling to receive treatment from an unfamiliar clinician they do not know or trust.

With this in mind, it is the responsibility of dentists on the receiving end of the referral to reassure the practitioner that their patients will always be in safe hands and returned to the surgery ready for any further treatment they may require. Referral dentists need to find a way of proving to fellow practitioners their abilities and dedication to excellent patient care, rather than simply relying on word of mouth or costly advertising campaigns.

Offering reassurance

Holding a well-organised referral evening is an excellent way of conveying this message in person to potential referring dentists. Not only does it give you the opportunity to showcase your skills, it also highlights your dedication to fostering relationships between fellow practitioners. By meeting potential referring dentists in person, solid foundations will be laid onto which good working relationships may be built.

In order to arrange a successful referral evening, clinicians will need to plan the event down to the last detail. A poorly arranged or half-hearted attempt will reflect badly on your professionalism and will only serve to drive practitioners away rather than recommend your services to their precious patients. Of course, time will have to be set aside to delegate roles to other members of staff and keep them well informed, as you will be relying greatly on their assistance too. Nevertheless, the more effort the team can put in beforehand, the greater the rewards will be afterwards. Even if just one impressed GDP sends their patients on to you for treatment as a result of the evening, all of the planning and preparation will have been worth it!

Giving something back

No dentist will want to waste an evening of their free time without feeling that they (and by extension, their patients) will gain something from it. Although some practitioners in the area may be actively seeking a dentist for patient referrals, chances are most clinicians will already have systems in place to deal with cases that lie outside of their own abilities. So, referral practices looking to cast their net a little wider will need to provide an incentive for clinicians to attend the event.

One possibility is to offer practitioners an educational evening that counts towards their verifiable CPD hours. And why limit the evening to dentists alone? Consider inviting dental nurses along to the event and offer them training too. After all, dental nurses play an important role in the team, so keeping them up to date with new techniques and procedures will make communication during procedures much clearer.

Building relationships

All referral practitioners should aim to work as an extension of their referral patients’ practice. In order for this to happen, excellent communication between practitioner, patient and referral dentist is key. If the referring dentist has an understanding of the kind of treatments you provide, they will be armed with the necessary information to inform their patients of their options and to describe the outcomes they should expect. For example, an implantologist holding a referral evening could organise a session outlining their experience, and arrange for dentists to discuss their referals’ options and outcomes.

Demonstrating your skills

Of course, no amount of refreshments and well-presented slideshows will be able to convince attendees of your practical ability as a clinician. A great way to showcase your abilities is to enlist the help of a real patient (with their permission of course!) and to perform a live demonstration. This certainly requires some nerve, but it will prove to delegates that you are confident in your abilities and will do wonders for your credibility as a professional. Even in a worst case scenario if something does go wrong during the demonstration, by keeping a clear head and following the usual procedures, delegates will leave with the knowledge that you know how to overcome tricky situations — further cementing your reliability.

Involving the whole team

Another aspect to consider during a referral evening is the involvement of any outside help you may require when treating referred patients. If, for example, you specialise in aesthetic dentistry and enlist the services of a laboratory for your prosthetics, invite a technician along to the evening to guide delegates through the range of products and materials that they offer. This not only serves to better inform practitioners, but also demonstrates, yet again, your dedication to close teamwork and communication throughout the entire patient journey.

Holding a well-planned referral evening is a perfect way to introduce your team and your services to other dentists in your local area, and to show them how you can work closely together to achieve the very best outcome for the patient.