Dear Bhavna,

I have just newly taken over a practice. My biggest challenge at the moment is getting new patients to walk through the door. Do you have any pointers for me?

This is a real problem many can relate to. Especially if you are developing a new practice or have just taken over a practice of whose marketing efforts you know little about.

It is important to develop a continual stream of new patients, no matter which practice you are in. This is so that you have a constant source of dentistry. New patients are the life-blood of any business. They allow you to have some level of leeway when getting case acceptances. For example if you don’t seem to be having a good month with patients going ahead with your treatment recommendations, then at least you know you will have that constant stream of new patients walking through the front door. It’s all about creating a safety net for yourself and having that reassurance that your business has its head above water.

The best way of attracting new patients to your practice is with an effective marketing strategy. This is not an action but more a plan of action. If the plan is incorrect then all your actions will be wasted (not to mention wasted money too).

An effective marketing plan is about understanding what kind of patients you are wanting in your practice and also whether it matches the types of treatment you are offering. Then it is about how to make the connection between the two. For example, there would be little advantage in advertising a cosmetic practice in an area where the major concerns were primarily health due to little extra disposable income. So you would need to think about venturing further afield to attract your most ideal patients.

The types of media you should consider are networking in your local area to build-up relationships with local traders who can refer you patients. This is marketing with the long term in mind.

Other things you can do is to work on your existing patients and provide them with some loyalty bonus for referring you more patients. So for every new patient referred you might want to give away a free hygiene visit or whatever else you can afford. Remember if you have taken over a practice your biggest and cheapest asset in terms of marketing will be your existing patients. You can easily send them information on your in-house referral programmes because you have their details.

Make sure you have an easy to steer website and have it optimised for major search engines. Other more extravagant things you could do is to organise charity events where each person must bring a friend with them. You would then take the details of this new prospective patient and market to them. Also, you could get great media coverage where you can get the opportunity to state how you are different.
Dear Bhavna,

I have a practice in a lower-income area, but wish to do more cosmetic base work. How can I bring more patients that would be interested in cosmetic dentistry into my practice?

Attracting the right type of patients is all about marketing in the correct places. If you wish to attract older patients then market in places you would find older patients. If you wish to attract children then market in places where parents are found. This makes sense. For this reason, if you find that your practice is poorly positioned, then you are not finding your ideal patients then you need to ‘position’ your marketing messages in a place where your ideal patients would be found.

So, if we consider the types of patients that need or want cosmetic dentistry, the question to ask is where are they found? This involves market research on our ideal patients. Patients interested in cosmetic dentistry are usually those patients that have some level of concern in the aesthetics of their appearance. This would mean appearance in general. So you need to market in places where this type of person would go.

For example, you could market and advertise your practice in your local beauty salons or gyms. Another thing you could do is build a two-way relationship with plastic surgeons. This way you both have a mutual understanding in how you both can benefit your patients and on how you can refer each other new patients.

If your particular local area does not provide you with your ideal target market, you should go to other places to attract them. You may need to do slightly broader marketing. Other things you can do are to go to beauty and wedding exhibitions and try to attract your market there. You can then continue to market to these people via the mail.

Dear Bhavna,

I am sometimes put on the spot when my patients or staff ask me questions about something they want or want me to do. How can I avoid answering them before I am ready to?

This sounds like an everyday challenge to me. And it forms a part of time-management. You should really only commit to an answer if you are sure this is the way you would like to go. It is usually quite frustrating when you have just committed to something and then feel as if you are under pressure to stick to your word. It will be these tiny facts, which usually surmount to larger intrinsic stress. Avoid them at all costs.

The best way around this I feel is if you just say to the person: ‘I’d like to think about this one if it’s OK with you’ or ‘I’m not quite sure of what my plans are so I’ll get back to you on that one’.

This way, you have heard their requirement and acknowledged them. You can then answer them in your own time and get an opportunity to figure out just how you would like things to be.

Planning is everything when you are running a business and time to think about how you want everything to fit together is equally important.

If you’ve a problem you need solving, please forward any questions you would like answered to bhavna@dentalwealthbuilder.com

If you would like to receive a free CD on how you can maximise on the revenues in your practice and create wealth in dentistry, then please email me three questions regarding your most challenging situations in your career/practice. Then forward this with your name and address to bhavna@dentalwealthbuilder.com

Dr Bhavna Doshi

is an international lecturer, who has worked extensively with the national media including: Extreme Makeover UK. She is the CEO of Dental Wealth Builder, which primarily focuses on practice productivity, cost-effective marketing and growth strategies.

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