Four tenets for tough times

Todays retailers certainly will confirm that when the economy takes a turn for the worse, consumer focus shifts from luxury to necessity. Moreover, many dentists would concur that they find similar behaviors in their practices. The focus of care must move to elective to need-based. Its tougher to sell those high dollar cosmetic cases. In addition, patients are less inclined to stay with your practice if you are not on their company’s insurance plan.

You are likely feeling the pain of more no-shows and cancellations. Everyone is walking on financial eggshells, many pause before they dare ask, “So how’s business these days?”

If you do begin to accept assignment of benefits, send a letter to all your patients – including those that have left your practice. You’ll likely find that the defectors never really wanted to abandon your office in the first place and would be glad to return.

Look at your schedule and adjust for down times. If the office is a tomb from 2-4 p.m., this is a drain on the dollars. Consider condensing your schedule, working a longer morning shift and a shorter afternoon shift, such as from 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 5:30-7 p.m. This will make it easier for working patients to see you during their lunch hours, and staff won’t be sitting around. Or, if you can keep three days full but the fourth is riddled with holes, cut back to three days.

Tenet No. 2: Get real and get paid

Look at your fees. Are yours better than your competition? You may feel your practice is worth the extra money, but unless patients are buying into your high dollar philosophy, you’ll have a tough time maintaining patient flow. It’s simply the realities of the current marketplace.

Consider foregoing an increase in fees this year. Send a letter to your patients thanking them for their loyalty to your practice. Take the opportunity to tell them that you are sensitive to the fact that many patients are experiencing difficulties as a result of the current economy. Note that, in an effort to be responsive to the needs of your patients, your office is holding to the line on fees this year, even though costs have increased for everyone, including your practice.

Next, make it easy for patients to pursue treatment. You may not be providing as much elective dentistry, but patients need-based. It’s tougher to sell those high dollar cosmetic cases. In addition, patients are less inclined to stay with your practice if you are not on their company’s insurance plan.

You are likely feeling the pain of more no-shows and cancellations. Everyone is walking on financial eggshells, many pause before they dare ask, “So how’s business these days?”

If you do begin to accept assignment of benefits, send a letter to all your patients – including those that have left your practice. You’ll likely find that the defectors never really wanted to abandon your office in the first place and would be glad to return.

Look at your schedule and adjust for down times. If the office is a tomb from 2-4 p.m., this is a drain on the dollars. Consider condensing your schedule, working a longer morning shift and a shorter afternoon shift, such as from 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 5:30-7 p.m. This will make it easier for working patients to see you during their lunch hours, and staff won’t be sitting around. Or, if you can keep three days full but the fourth is riddled with holes, cut back to three days.

Tenet No. 2: Get real and get paid

Look at your fees. Are yours better than your competition? You may feel your practice is worth the extra money, but unless patients are buying into your high dollar philosophy, you’ll have a tough time maintaining patient flow. It’s simply the realities of the current marketplace.

Consider foregoing an increase in fees this year. Send a letter to your patients thanking them for their loyalty to your practice. Take the opportunity to tell them that you are sensitive to the fact that many patients are experiencing difficulties as a result of the current economy. Note that, in an effort to be responsive to the needs of your patients, your office is holding to the line on fees this year, even though costs have increased for everyone, including your practice.

Next, make it easy for patients to pursue treatment. You may not be providing as much elective dentistry, but patients...