Streamlining operations

Jo Banks discusses how to simplify the day-to-day running of your practice and ensure your appointment systems are working smoothly

Used correctly, the appointment book can be the practice team's greatest ally. Not only can it that the reception room does not become a waiting room, but it is also the cornerstone of a smooth-running practice.

However, the appointment book is also one of the tools we use day-to-day without really utilising it effectively and it is easy to take it for granted. By following the top tips below you, can get your appointment system working seamlessly and ensure that you are taking full advantage of this valuable tool.

Manage new patients

It is important to make sure every new patient feels valued, as choosing a dentist is a significant decision and requires a feeling of trust in both the dentist and the practice. Therefore, when a new patient contacts the practice by telephone to make an appointment - why not send them a practice information leaflet, directions to the practice and a medical history questionnaire, together with their appointment card? By doing this you are not only reminding the patient of their appointment, but you are also reducing the time they have to wait in reception by saving them completing any forms when they arrive.

Book at short notice

If a patient calls for an appointment, if their dentist is unable to see them, and the name of the replacement dentist who is seeing them.

This is particularly important for nervous patients, as they may have built up a level of trust with their regular dentist and may not feel comfortable seeing anyone else. If you leave it until they are time to record the relevant details, such as the date, time and who they will be seeing at their appointment, in their diaries. This not only reduces the risk of missed appointments but also provides them the opportunity to explain any problems or concerns, which will put them at their ease and also help the dentist.

Be clear on charges

Appointment time is precious in any practice, so it is essential to make sure patients, especially new ones, understand the practice’s policy on cancelled appointments. Other options include a patient newsletter or adding this information to your practice website.

Keep it legible

The appointment book is also one of the tools we use day-to-day without really utilising it effectively and it is easy to take it for granted.

It is also a great idea to give patients a courtesy call around one to two days before their appointment. This cuts down on missed appointments from patients that have forgotten or accidentally double booked, and also gives you time to book last minute appointments. Many practices have found that text reminders are far more effective or e-mail reminders for those who have provided email addresses. This is also a great time-saving method for the practice team.

Name names

Another way of making patients feel relaxed and appreciated is to ensure that they know which member of the team they will be seeing at each appointment. If your patient visits a particular dentist regularly, be sure to let them know, before their appointment, if their dentist is unable to see them, and the name of the replacement dentist who is seeing them.

Appointment charges

This will discourage last minute cancellations and no-shows, while also helping to keep the appointment book up-to-date, with more appointments to fill cancellations with last minute appointments.

Give patients time

Be sure to allow sufficient time for patients to make their appointments, either in person or on the phone, and not to rush them. This is an effective and easy way of making patients feel valued; it and also gives them opportunity to inform them of this, they may not feel comfortable enough to go ahead with it and therefore it is wasted appointment time.

You could also put this in your patient information leaflet or welcome packs to new patients. This may create an initial cost, but this expenditure can often pay dividends when it comes to cancelled appointments. Other options include a patient newsletter or adding this information to your practice website.

About the author

Jo Banks is Sales Trainer Manager. Jo joined Denplan in 1993, providing bespoke training to dentists and their practice teams on a wide range of subject areas. She has a wealth of understanding of modern practice. As well as providing bespoke training, she has been instrumental in developing the Denplan Excel Accreditation Training Programme and the Introductory Training Course for dentists converting to Denplan.