The Steps of the Patient Journey

Glenys Bridges highlights the importance of the patient journey

S
ome dental profession-
as argue that the patient journey is becoming a passé phrase that’s losing its appeal. In some cases this may well be the case. Never-theless it has long been clear that dental patients are look-
ing for much, much more than good dentistry. Those prac-
tices that have recognised the importance of making their pa-
tients feel important and appreciated in these difficult financial times seem to be the practices that retain their pa-
tient base, whilst others with a lesser emphasis on customer care are losing theirs.

Since delighting patients need not be costly, or time consuming in these days of high-tech communications, once a pathway for the patient journey has been established, implementing the required processes and procedures needs only the lightest touch in respect of time and re-
ources.

Impact

Over the years, numerous people have expressed con-
cerns about the imminent, technology-driven dental re-
ception desk. Much in the same way as the first automat-
ic cash dispensers were greet-
ed when then the banks first introduced them. Nowadays the disapproval that would be ex-
pressed should any of the banks withdraw that service only goes to show how chang-
es in our lifestyles and use of technology have impacted upon what we want from ser-
vice providers.

An essential feature of good customer care is consist-
ency. Excellent experiences both raise expectations and motivate patients to recom-

dend friends. Once high expectations for excellent service are in place, just pro-
viding very good service will disappoint. This is one way in which automated services have the edge. They deliver to the standards they are pro-
gammed to. Is this likely to reduce the human touch? No it is not, rather it will con-
centrate the team’s attention where it is really needed and streamline to routine con-
tacts, so that patients experi-
ence these as being faster and more responsive. Here is an example of how this can work.

Patient Journey

Step 1 - This step is taken when a patient starts to surf the Internet to find a dental practice they like the look of. If when they are looking they find a website that gives them the option to ask questions and also to book an appointment, then their journey begins. At this point the patient has the option to link their dental reg-
istration to their Facebook, so that their appointments
can be managed on their smartphone. At this point they can also create their dental computer records and if they wish, add their photograph. This in turn can be linked to the practice phone system so that when they call their name, picture and records open on the screen, allowing the receptionist to answer the phone with a personalised greeting.

**Step 2** - In response to the booking the patient receives an email, welcoming them to the practice and giving them some useful information about the practice including directions, the availability of parking, and the range of services and products offered at the practice. This can be followed up automatically with an appointment reminder by phone, text or email as per the patient’s request.

**Daylist**
**Step 3** - On arrival at the practice, the receptionist will have a day list which displays patients’ photos. On arrival, if the patient prefers to they can use the auto check-in. They have the option to deal with a person, or to use an automated touch screen system. The benefits of this are that it speeds up the check-in, freeing-up the receptionist’s time to devote to the post assessment interaction in which the patient is likely to have questions to ask.

**Step 4** - After the assessment or subsequent appointments, the system will send a ‘thank you for visiting us’ email. This will be a chance for the patient to provide feedback, in a format that will meet CQC compliance requirements. It allows patients to give feedback upon their dental experiences. This also allows the practice to send the patients links to information, videos and other apps that inform and educate.

**Step 5** - When treatment is complete another chance to provide feedback which will be managed, and with the permission of the patients these can be built into a blog/testimonial to place on the practice website. A couple of weeks after the completion of treatment a ‘Hope things are going well following your procedure’ email can be sent. At any time patients can opt out from the automatic email stream.

**Feedback**
One system that delivers all this is Welltime Patient Connections (www.welltime.co.uk). It is an impressive system, offering patients the option of the light touch approach to customer care, which many patients appreciate. However, it must be said that as in all things this is not right for all patients. The bonus is that patients can select the type of customer care they want. When patients choose this system because they prefer this format, they free up the receptionist’s time to devote to those patients that want to interact with people, rather than technology.

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