The Steps of the Patient Journey

Glenys Bridges highlights the importance of the patient journey

Some dental professionals argue that the patient journey is becoming a passé phrase that’s losing its appeal. In some cases this may well be the case. Nevertheless it has long been clear that dental patients are looking for much, much more than good dentistry. Those practices that have recognised the importance of making their patients feel important and appreciated in these difficult financial times seem to be the practices that retain their patient 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 resources.

Impact

Over the years, numerous people have expressed concerns about the imminent, technology-driven dental reception desk. Much in the same way as the first automatic cash dispensers were greeted when then the banks first introduced them. Nowadays the disapproval that would be expressed should any of the banks withdraw that service only goes to show how changes in our lifestyles and use of technology have impacted upon what we want from service providers.

An essential feature of good customer care is consistency. Excellent experiences both raise expectations and motivate patients to recommend friends. Once high expectations for excellent service are in place, just providing very good service will disappoint. This is one way in which automated services have the edge. They deliver to the standards they are programmed to. Is this likely to reduce the human touch? No it is not, rather it will concentrate the team’s attention where it is really needed and streamline to routine contacts, so that patients experience 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 registration into their Facebook, so that their appointments

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‘Excellent experiences both raise expectations and motivate patients to recommend friends’
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 5 - 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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About the author
Glenys Bridges highlights the importance of the patient journey. In some cases this passé phrase that’s losing its

Glenys is an experienced management trainer and assessor with 20 year experience of working with General Dental Practitioners and their teams. In addition, she has experience and qualifications in Counselling and Life Coaching. Her first book Dental Practice Management and Reception was published in 2006 her second book, Dental Management in Practice was published during 2012.