Wow prospective patients at first contact

Cathy Johnson offers advice for creating a perfect patient welcome pack

When a new enquiry is received in your practice, what happens? Is the prospective patient sent a few unbranded treatment leaflets with a brief covering letter? Not only is this unprofessional, once removed from the envelope the random leaflets do not relate to your practice. Almost as bad, are your patients sent practice literature about which you feel a twinge of embarrassment because of the low quality?

Every new patient enquiry is an opportunity to promote your practice; an invitation to send an attractively designed welcome pack that will reinforce your brand, communicate all that you offer and appeal to a prospective new patient.

Giving your existing patients a tastefully designed and informative pack also makes sense – to ensure they know everything you have to offer and are less likely to be tempted to go elsewhere.

Before considering your welcome pack, do some mystery shopping. Find out what practices near you send to prospective patients. If they have beautifully produced packs, you will need to up your game.

A welcome pack should be attractive, tidy and informative. Above all, it must look professional and make your practice irresistible. While A5 is the most popular size because it is a practical size for posting and comfortable to read, there are no set rules. Some dental practices prefer A4, others a square format.

The welcome pack can be a simple folded leaflet, a more comprehensive multi-page brochure or a series of individual sheets – which offer the greatest flexibility to accommodate changes. A smart outer folder/wallet with a pocket keeps everything neatly together and means you can include information about special offers as the need arises. However, do beware of overloading patients; having too many bits of paper to sift through can be off-putting. Discuss and agree the format with your designer at the outset. Likewise, share your thoughts on the overall look you are hoping for.

Essentially, the contents of a welcome pack should comprise:
- A welcoming introduction, including the philosophy of the practice
- Who you are – a brief biography of the principal dentist and an overview of the team members
- Treatment options
- Testimonials
- A map and directions
- Opening hours
- Contact details and information about emergency appointments
- A smile analysis form (as separate insert)
- Fee guide (as separate insert)
- Referral card (to hand on to friends and family)

The wording should be clear, concise and patient-centred, focusing on the outcome of treatment rather than excessive technical detail. If your practice looks great inside and/or outside, flaunt it by including lots of photographs. Make sure to invest in good photography and don’t be tempted to take your own snaps, the quality (or lack of it) will show. If the practice interior is not its best feature, put in a nice team photo instead.

A good dental designer will have some stock photos of people with beautiful smiles but if you have any real patient photos you may choose to include them. The general consensus is to avoid ‘before and after’ photographs as the ‘before’ pictures will be unattractive and may reduce the instant appeal of your welcome pack. Save them for specific sections on your website.

A business card or appointment card can be inserted loosely or tucked into pre-cut slits in the pocket of the folder. The patient usually completes...
a medical history form at their first visit to the practice and you may choose to include one in the pack.

A smile analysis form is a simple list of statements for the patient to tick those they feel to be relevant. Completed by the patient before their first visit, it is an excellent tool for opening discussion about what they may be looking for in terms of their dental health and appearance. It should support the treatment options outlined in your main brochure. If a patient has ticked a statement such as ‘I feel my old silver fillings are unsightly’ or ‘I wish my teeth were whiter’, you can readily offer the appropriate solution.

The quality of your welcome pack reflects on the quality of your practice and your treatments so when it comes to printing, make sure you go for high quality. With printing you get what you pay for and all the effort invested in design, writing and images can be ruined by a lousy print job.

For similar reasons, forget about a DIY welcome pack. Make sure it is beautifully designed; professionally printed and better than anything else your patients receive. Then all you have to do is distribute it freely, with pride and confidence.

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