Why improving your practice is a mystery – part nine

Jacqui Goss asks: Who are you?

Okay, pop quiz time! In July 1978 a single was released which was an edited version of the album track of the same name and reached number 18 in the record charts. The title of the single was the same as the album released a month later and included part of the name of the band. That’s correct, it’s Who Are You by The Who.

My point? Well, here I want to discuss why and how you should make yourself as visible and memorable as you can. Don’t worry, I won’t advocate you donning fancy dress and parading down the high street – which must surely be banned by GDC rules. And, in any case, I’m using the ‘royal’ you – your practice, your practice team and you.

Patient journey

I’ve written before about how your team should work to ensure each person enjoys a ‘wow’ patient journey. But the benefits of that great experience in terms of the opportunity for patients to share it with friends and family, will be lost if they can’t remember who you are. You may think you’re memorable but believe me you’re eminently forgettable! Don’t take it personally. As soon as patients have their foot out of the door they’ll probably begin forgetting the name of your practice, most likely failing to recall the name of the dentist or hygienist they saw and certainly putting out of their minds the names of nurses and front of house (FoH) staff. I offer no science to support this, only empirical evidence based on making telephone calls to patients when I’m commissioned to undertake satisfaction surveys.

So, how do you counter this collective and, presumably, selective amnesia? Quite simply, your name (by which I mean the practice name and appropriate team member names) should go everywhere. Logo and nameplate design is not my department but I do know they should be distinctive, memorable and repeatedly visible. I’ve quite often walked in to a dental practice (and other establishments) and seen nothing to reinforce the knowledge that I’m in the correct place. Look around your practice – does my comment ring true? There are, of course, many places to put your practice name and or logo – leaflets, posters, mugs, pens and so on.

Name calling

Turning to the FoH team, which is my department, there are several ways they can reinforce the name of the practice, the names of the clinical staff and their own names. The most obvious is for the information to be on their clothing. However, this may not be obviously visible to the patient as they approach the reception area (they may not be wearing their reading glasses) so have nice large nameplates on the desk or counter as well. FoH staff should get in the habit of introducing themselves. This is vital on the telephone but also useful in face-to-face contact. As well as the ‘who are you?’ benefits I’m discussing...
here, it also prevents patients having to make awkward references such as: “The girl on reception said…” or “Can you lend me your pen, er, miss?”

Now for some clinical staff name reinforcement. Foul staff should say something similar to: “Right Mrs Goss, your appointment is with Doctor XXXX in five minutes and her nurse, XXXX, will collect you when she is ready.”

They can actually be a bit more sophisticated. If the dentist or hygienist in question is a recent addition to the practice team how about: “Okay, Mrs Goss, your appointment is with XXXX our new hygienist, whom I’m sure you’ll like.”

If your practice offers, say, cosmetic treatments, what about: “Now Mrs Goss, your appointment is with our cosmetic dentist, Mrs XXXXX, and her nurse, XXXXX, will come for you in just a few minutes.” No harm in other patients overhearing that you have a cosmetic dentist!

Of course, XXXXX the nurse should subsequently say something like: “Hello Mrs Goss, I’m XXXXX and Mrs XXXXX is ready for you now.”

Reminders
Don’t let patients leave without something reminding them where they’ve been and who they’ve seen. Even with SMS and email reminders, the old appointment reminder card system is still valid and should be used. You may also consider a system whereby patients get rewarded for recommending a friend. If so, you’ll need to give them something they can pass on – similar to a business card, perhaps.

There is an almost endless choice of corporate gifts as potential giveaways. I favour things that are likely to be retained and, preferably, kept where they are easily visible. My noticeboard in the kitchen is so overcrowded that for this reason I suggest avoiding things that need to be pinned up. How about a fridge magnet, a branded pen or a mouse mat instead? For ideas of giveaways, I suggest you look at the British Dental Health Foundation shop (http://www.dental-health.org/shop). Anything you do give to patients must contain your practice name and contact details.

And finally, a few words about social media. If you set up a practice Twitter, Facebook or other social media account, do make your posts ‘social’ (ie not just oral health orientated) and do keep it going. A dormant account gives a poor impression – shut it down if you’re no longer going to use it. On LinkedIn, which is a showcase for your professional identity and a networking opportunity, don’t be shy – include a profile image! You don’t really want people wondering: Who are you? Who, who, who, who? Who are you? Who, who, who, who?