Happy New Year! So, is 2015 when you’ll develop your good dental practice into a great dental practice? I hope so because that’s what my new series of articles should help you to do. In a further nine instalments I’ll run through everything from telephony excellence to patient satisfaction and systematic follow-up to instinctive marketing.

Don’t misunderstand me; this is not a series of master-classes. Far be it from me to claim virtuosity. What I do have are years of experience in retail management followed by more years in dental practice management and business development. Currently, I’m racking up the years in practice management consultancy – meaning I get to visit, assess, advise, help and mentor a lot of dental practices.

Together with the practice owner and practice team we move things forward, improve the patient journey, attract more patients, increase turnover and profits and make the practice a happier, more efficient place to work. The key word in that sentence is together.

This series will be me sharing ideas with you, raising topics for you to consider, recommending sources of information, suggesting ideas and explaining what does and does not work. You don’t need to do everything or even anything I suggest. You may take a contrary view and choose a different course of action. At the very least, I hope my articles help you think, help you assess where you and your practice are along the developmental continuum and help you decide what steps to take. Who was it that said: “standing still is not an option”? I don’t know. But then none of us knows everything, do we?

While it’s true that a journey of 1,000 miles begins with the first step, unless you make that step in the correct direction, you’ll so get lost! With this in mind, the journey from good practice to great practice could usefully begin with an audit. Aaargh! Stop reading now... I’ve written the a-word! Don’t worry I’m suggesting a back of an envelope audit rather than a full-scale Audit with a capital ‘A’. It will be a quick assessment of where you and your practice are. Consider it a glance at a map and the taking of a compass bearing to ensure your first step is in exactly the right direction.

You can do it solo or in conjunction with your associate(s) or practice manager but I strongly suggest you involve your whole team. Not only is their cooperation and support going to be vital during the development of the practice but also they see and know things that you and senior staff don’t.

On the basis that developmental action is best done if it’s fun, I suggest you set the tone from the start. So, for the next team meeting, ask each member of staff to bring along an envelope. As an aside, you may wish to note those who come with a used one rescued from the paper recycling bin (positive Brownie points) and those who bring a brand new one taken from the stationary cupboard (negative Brownie points). Say you wish to conduct a back of an envelope audit of how good the practice is and then join your staff writing down very broad headings such as: premises, marketing, appointments, ambience, house communication, dealing with complaints and so on.

Start the ball rolling and then take suggestions for headings from team members – until you have about ten or a dozen. Now ask everyone to rate the practice from one (poor) to 10 (brilliant) against each heading and do so yourself. You should encourage quick personal responses without debate or discussion. Collect the envelopes and look at the ratings after the meeting. If one or more headings have been marked low (especially by more than one person), you’ll need to bottom out what the problem(s) is/are and work out how to resolve it/them as a priority. For ideas and assistance you can access my previous Dental Tribune articles here: http://www.dental-tribune.com/printarchive/index/product/25

My guess is that yours really is a good practice, the ratings should be above the median value under all headings. So, which direction is now appropriate for your first steps toward dental practice greatness? I suggest you follow the same route as I intend taking with this series of articles – the patient journey. This should also ensure you develop a (even more) patient-centred practice.

Without going into great detail at this stage, I suggest the patient journey comprises the following stages:

- step one, a patient finds out your practice exists
- step two, a patient makes an enquiry and makes an appointment
- step three, a patient arrives at the practice
- step four, a patient is dealt with according to whether they are new or existing
- step five, a patient receives clinical assessment or treatment
- step six, the recommended course of action is discussed with a patient
- step seven, a patient is dealt with according to the agreed course of action
- step eight, feedback is obtained from the patient

It doesn’t end there, of course, as the feedback should be one of the things that influence changes and enhancements to step one and the rest of the journey.

Now, I fully appreciate that I’ve not included some of the terms, such as telephone excellence and instore marketing, which I mentioned earlier. I’ve also apparently left out topics such as administration systems, follow-up procedures and PR. To my mind, all these things should flow from the patient journey. For example, PR and marketing should relate to step one in that potential new patients need to learn of your existence in the first place. Administration systems should support how efficiently patients are ‘processed’ and should allow for proper management of the practice – they are not there merely for their own sake or just to give practice managers a headache when they go wrong!

With each of my articles, I’ll try to suggest further reading or research for you and your team. This time, I recommend you buy or borrow The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People® by Stephen R. Covey, which is an excellent book for focusing on specific ways of thinking and acting to become more effective.

About the author

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