AAA - After Appointment Action

By Dr. Ehab Heikal

A very typical frustration for many dentists is to have cancelled apointments. And I have discussed in another section of in my book, that such cases should be punished in case of no show.

However, the coercive action of punishment is a tool to minimize such incidents, so it is not the aim. Especially that, in some cases, you cannot punish the patient if the appointment is cancelled early enough.

And my concern now is not regarding your clients or existing patients, I am concerned now with your new patients that have never been treated at your office before.

So what happens between the time of appointment setting and the time of cancellation?

The simplest thing is that the patients could get busy, and since they will not consider the dental treatment as a priority compared to whatever came up and they have to do. They will find no motive preventing them from re-scheduling or cancelling the appointment. ‘I have too many things to do today—I’ll just cancel my appointment.’

What also helps is that a dental appointment is not a pleasant one for many reasons you know. Also they might be attracted to another dentist through word of mouth. For example, Sally was discussing with her friends the treatment plan she is planning to perform at your clinic, or the filling she is about to have, and of course the fear of pain will be a major player in the discussion, so Susan suggests that Sally goes to her (Susan’s) dentist as she has never felt any pain at his clinic. Here we have a shift through an opinion leader for Sally based on the motive of avoidance of pain.

Or consider this patient thinking: “I should be going back to my old dentist—he wasn’t great, but I knew him. Why am I changing?”

Here the fear of change is the motive. Or the theory of: the bad I know is better than the good I don’t know!!!

I can list hundreds of examples, but that is not my point. My aim is to assist you in overcoming those complications.

We have to set a motive and help the patient by throwing the rope and pulling him/her to our clinic.

You need to make it easier for your patient to mentally confirm the appointment, and to eliminate the hesitation barrier.

The Professional New Patient Kit

There is one simple way: you need to create a Professional New Patient Kit. This could be an electronic kit for internet and computer users, or a hard copy kit that you can send via any local courier in town.

You need to send this kit out the same day you set the appointment.

The kit is composed of a brochure—an appointment card—even a welcome letter—plus a complimentary copy of your newsletter. Effectively, each piece responds to a different unasked question, building confidence and commitment on the spot!

How the components work together

The Welcome Letter is a conversational greeting between you and your new patient—the equivalent of eye contact and a handshake.

The Welcome Brochure introduces you and your practice. It outlines your clinical credibility, maps your location, lists your services. And, most important, answers the unasked questions: Will you understand my fears? Can you protect me from communicable diseases? How will you handle my emergency?

The Appointment Card confirms date and time—subconsciously strengthening resolve to keep the appointment.

Your Clinic Newsletter demonstrates your commitment to informative communication with every patient.

Research shows that going to the dentist is very low on the list of things people like to do. One of the key reservations is fear of the unknown. The worst part of this factor is that most people are too embarrassed to ask questions. Your brochure should answer the questions so there’s no need for people to be fearful.

The Welcome Brochure answers them for you automatically—before the very first appointment! The way is paved, and that tenuous connection between you and the first-timer grows to a positive commitment.