



Accepting New Patients? Schedule within Seven Days

By Roger P. Levin, DDS

In many areas across the country, competition for new dental patients has increased dramatically in the past several years. Delayed retirements, more dental school graduates and the spread of dental management organizations... combined with reduced demand for oral health care... have led dentists to rethink how they are accepting new patients and their handling of calls and scheduling.

Don't Keep New Patients Waiting

The more time that's allowed to pass between patients' first call to your office and their first appointment, the greater the risk that they'll hear about some other practice worth considering—or that they'll simply change their mind about seeing a dentist at all. For this reason, you should do everything possible to bring in new patients within a week. Take these essential steps:

- **Block out openings for new patients in your schedule.** Based on the recent history of new patients coming to your practice (factoring in expected response to any planned marketing activities), allocate a specific number of slots to be used for new patient appointments every week. As the days go by, your scheduling coordinator can give unused openings to emergency cases or patients on your wait list. With experience, you'll be able to make sure that these slots don't go to waste.
- **Train your scheduling coordinator to follow the 7-day rule.** Rewrite the script used by your front desk coordinator to include the 7-day scheduling objective. With training, she'll be able to appoint most new patient callers within that time frame, guiding them to the reserved openings rather than asking, *"When would you like to come in?"*

Follow Up with an Excellent New Patient Experience

Seeing new patients within seven days is a vital first step, but when they arrive, you and your staff must make them feel they've made the right decision. Ensure that your customer service systems and staff scripting are designed to create a warm welcome and build value into the practice-patient relationship. You have an important role to play as well. Unless you're addressing an urgent need for treatment, conduct a comprehensive examination and prepare an ideal treatment plan for new patients. In this way, your practice will not only be acquiring new patients but also laying the foundation for a long and productive relationship.