



Scheduling Dental Hygiene Appointments

By Roger P. Levin, DDS

Finding new patients has become more difficult than ever. Convincing them during their first appointment to join your practice is critical. However, in the long run, scheduling them for regular dental hygiene appointments has the greatest impact on your practice.

If you only saw patients when they realized they had an oral health problem, you'd have a great deal of difficulty forming a lasting practice-patient relationship (except with those unfortunate individuals with troublesome teeth). The production potential typically associated with new patients would be difficult to tap if they rarely came to your office. What's more, they might never feel the trust and loyalty needed for them to think of you as "their dentist."

Scheduling them in for routine hygiene appointments (including exams by you) solves these problems.

Making the Case for Recare

The first requirement for establishing regular hygiene visits is educational. The better your patients understand what the hygienist does for them and why it's important, the easier it will be to keep them on the recommended schedule. With proper training—including scripts—and other support, such as a checklist of services provided, your hygienist should take every opportunity to reaffirm the value of the preventative care she provides.

The challenge is to maintain this sense of value in patients who've been with your practice for years. The fact that your hygienist educated patients some time ago means that they need to be reminded periodically.

Keeping Patients Scheduled at All Times

Whether your hygienist or your front desk coordinator takes responsibility for scheduling, the next appointment should be set before patients leave your office. If they decline at that moment, they should be contacted within seven days to see if they're ready to make the appointment.

Many people—probably including some of your patients—are trying to control spending more tightly these days. If they don't appreciate the value of hygiene visits, or if your practice doesn't *gently* persist in trying to get them scheduled, they may become inactive.

Confirming Appointments Effectively

Help patients remember their appointments and present on time by using effective confirmation techniques—some combination of phone call, email, texting, confirmation service or perhaps even postcards.