

The Hygiene Appointment: More than “A Cleaning”

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The hygiene appointment not only helps maintain patients' oral health but also has everything to do with maintaining a healthy patient-practice relationship. Without these routine, regularly scheduled visits, your patients can lose touch with you, become inactive, and even be open to seeing some other dentist if they have a problem in the future.

Yet, in spite of its importance, many patients still think of hygiene appointments as just “a cleaning.” Unfortunately, quite a few dental staff members reinforce this misconception by referring to it that way themselves!

To make sure your patients set a high value on hygiene appointments at your practice, follow these recommendations:

- **Clean up your language.** If you, your hygienist, scheduling coordinator or other staff members sometimes call the hygiene appointment a “cleaning,” stop. You're undermining its value and making it much easier for your patients to decide they don't really need to come in. Use a new, more appropriate term, like “oral health maintenance appointment” or “continuing periodontal care and oral cancer exam.”
- **Educate patients not only about proper home care but also about what services are provided during the appointment.** The average patient has only a vague idea of what services the hygienist is performing. Encourage your hygienist to provide a running commentary about what she's doing and why.
- **Consider using a hygiene checklist for patients.** Produce a simple form with checkboxes and spaces for comments that the hygienist can complete and give to patients at the end of their appointments. This “report card” will help patients understand and *appreciate* hygiene services.
- **Add value by dispensing home care products.** Make it easier for your patients to acquire oral healthcare products that both you and the hygienist recommend, as dental professionals. Offering them directly from your practice reinforces the relationship and underlines the importance of making regular hygiene appointments.
- **Script your front desk coordinator to keep patients scheduled.** When patients decline to make their next appointment, cancel without agreeing to reschedule, or simply not show up, a properly scripted and trained coordinator can “push back” gently but effectively... changing patients' minds in many cases.

Use these and other techniques to convince patients that the hygiene appointment is much more than just a cleaning. Your patients will benefit... and so will your practice.

Author



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