

Dental Follow Up: Setting the Next Appointment

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The very last step in the New Patient Experience is, in a way, the most important. Let's suppose that your front desk coordinator has handled the initial new patient call skillfully... your entire team has helped introduce the new patient to the practice in a warm and trust-building way... and you have excelled chairside. Even so, the new patient could turn out to be no patient at all if you don't schedule him or her for the *next* appointment.

At a time when there are fewer patients to go around, you can't afford to let any new patients slip away. Though you may make a powerful first impression, you need to ensure that the relationship continues. Here's how:

- **If it's an appointment for treatment**, schedule it to occur within 7–10 days of the first visit. This accomplishes two very important objectives. First, it leaves little time for patients to have second thoughts. It also shows that your practice is highly efficient and dedicated to caring for its patients. Both diminish the possibility of a cancellation or no-show. Your staff will, of course, implement your confirmation system to improve compliance.
- **If it's a routine hygiene visit**, you'll need to rely more on your confirmation system to ensure that patients keep their appointments. Another effective way to entice patients back is to communicate the value of regularly scheduled hygiene visits. Use a "not just a cleaning" script that details the many services provided by your hygienist and explains that preventive care is better (easier, less costly and more pleasant) than corrective dentistry.

The New Patient Experience is designed to result in a long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationship between patients and your practice. To accomplish this, be sure to secure that *second* appointment by the end of the first.

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