

The Comprehensive Dental Exam for New Patients

By Roger P. Levin, DDS

The New Patient Experience—with its relationship-building first phone call and warm welcome to the office—has a strong customer service focus. But the main event occurs in the treatment area when you examine new patients for the first time. What you do at the dental exam stage can have a tremendous impact on your patients' oral health as well as on practice production for years to come.

To make the most of this clinical introduction to your practice, perform a comprehensive Five Phase Exam, which consists of:

- 1. Periodontal** – Ascertaining the condition of patients' gums sets up a conversation about the impact of oral health on overall health, the treatment options your practice offers and the importance of monitoring and maintaining gum health during scheduled hygiene visits.
- 2. Tooth-by-Tooth Exam** – Documenting caries, cracks and other current or potential problems will tell you—and patients—what treatment options will be needed in both the short and long term.
- 3. Cosmetic Exam** – In this stage, you'll be able to identify opportunities for cosmetic dentistry, educating patients about their conditions and treatment options and also getting a sense of which services patients may eventually be interested in.
- 4. Implant Exam** – All edentulous patients, as well as those with teeth that may be lost in the future, should be regarded as prospects for implants. Though you may not yet be recommending this option, you can begin educating and motivating patients now... which will often result in implant production later.
- 5. Occlusal Exam** – By diagnosing and pointing out (with articulating paper) bite problems, you'll set the stage for possible intervention by you or an orthodontist.

The Benefits of a Comprehensive Approach

There are many ways a comprehensive exam during patients' first visit will benefit your practice. They include:

- Impressing new patients with your thoroughness and attentiveness to their condition and oral healthcare needs
- Providing you with the clinical details you need for creating a comprehensive treatment plan including both need-based and elective treatment
- Enabling you to begin what may be a long-term process of persuading them to accept multi-tooth, cosmetic and other elective treatment, not just presenting recommendations for immediate action
- Giving you the perfect opportunity to talk to new patients about the range of dental services available at your office
- Allowing time for you and patients to get to know each other personally, which will serve as a foundation for an ongoing relationship

Center the New Patient Experience around a comprehensive exam and both your patients and your practice will benefit for years to come.

Author



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