

Being good to your patients is good for your bottom line

If you asked your friends about the things they least enjoy doing, you will probably find (somewhere between waiting in line at the DMV and going to the in-laws) visiting the dentist somewhere on their list. With memories of teeth scraping, 'open wide' jaw pain, and uncomfortable dentist chairs... who could blame them?

Happy patients that experience a dental visit as a positive instead of a negative are more likely to both get regular treatment from their dentist, and also to recommend them to friends and family.

Because not all dentists and their staffs are as well-educated in patient comfort as they are in patient care, many people have come to develop anxiety toward their upcoming dental appointment. Although certainly not everyone possesses a deep fear of going to the dentist, it is a serious concern for those who do - one that has the potential to prevent them from seeking out the type of care that will allow them to lead happier, healthier lives.



By learning to become more sensitive to patient concerns, dental offices not only help improve someone else's quality of life, but also help ensure that they keep their current patient base satisfied.

When combined with previous bad experience, and the negative ways in which dentistry is often portrayed on television and in films, it is no surprise that many are anxious before ever taking a seat in the dentist's chair.

CONTINUED ON PAGE TWO

Legislative Update — issues that concern the dentist

Effective January 1, 2009, Dental Health Services is implementing a Language Assistance Program (LAP) designed to assist our Limited English Proficiency (LEP) members with translation and interpretation services. As required by the Department of Managed Health Care, your office is subject to the implementation of this new policy, as it relates to your interaction with our enrollees.

All LEP enrollees are to be offered interpretation services through Dental Health Services and its affiliated dental offices, even if they are accompanied by a friend or relative to their office visit. Dental Health Services has contracted with an industry-leading language assistance company, Language Line, to provide interpretation services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. If enrollees decline the offer for interpretation services, this must be recorded in their file.

Your office will be contacted with more information regarding instructions for how to make these new interpretation services available to Dental Health Services' members. Please note that the Language Assistance Program is now a part of our Quality Assurance program and will be monitored very closely by our Director of Dental Services and Compliance. Your office will be surveyed on a quarterly basis to assess the language capabilities of your office staff.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? CONTACT US!



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

In response to these common feelings, some dental professionals have opted to become highly attuned to their patients' needs and wants. Often referred to as "spa-style" dentistry, practices in this niche market boast such amenities as heated aromatherapy pillows; trickling water fountains, or gals "water walls;" vibrating dentist chairs; glasses with small "screens" that allow patients to watch DVDs during a procedure and even neck and foot massages.

The main reason why "spa-style" dentistry has become popular with patients and successful for dental practices is the idea that it is patient-focused.

Designed to alleviate the stress that many associate with visiting the dentist, the patient's attention is diverted from what is going on inside his or her mouth. In doing so, the focus is taken off the negative aspects of dentistry.

This also communicates to the patients that the dentist and his or her staff is genuinely concerned not only with their oral health, but also their state of mind and their dental experience as a whole.

The American Dental Association™ has also increasingly recognized the importance of the patient's well being. With that in mind, there are a lot of easy and inexpensive ways to offer patient-focused care that works to relieve the common feelings of fear and anxiety about dental care. A pleasant smelling office makes a good first impression, and a few candles can make a big difference. Similarly, adding fresh flowers not only adds a nice scent, but also brings a touch of vibrancy, freshness and color. Using soft lighting whenever possible helps to reinforce the message that the patient is not at a typical dental office. Making water or fresh juice available in the waiting area, along with playing soft calming background music, can both accomplish the same goal.

Perhaps the best method is the simplest of all: talk to your patients. Are they afraid of something? If so, why? Find out if there are any steps that the dentist and staff can take to alleviate their fears.

Many of the same rules that apply to all businesses are relevant to dental practices as well. In an industry that has become increasingly competitive, the ability to set one

5 QUICK WAYS

To Make Your Office More Comfortable

- **Buy fresh Flowers**
Engage the senses with color and smell
- **Offer water or juice**
A simple and satisfying perk
- **Use soft lighting**
Set yourself apart from the "typical" office
- **Offer calming music**
Focus nervous energy elsewhere
- **Talk to your patients**
Listen to their needs. What can you do to help?

practice apart from the rest is important. Patients assume they will receive quality dental care, but surprising them and impressing them and exceeding their expectations when it comes to being sensitive to their needs is also critical.

Most importantly, doing so will cause patients to be *happier and more comfortable* and more likely to make and keep regularly scheduled dental visits. With the mouth playing an important role as the gateway to the entire body, this gives them greater opportunity to maximize their overall health.

Being in tune with patient concerns also has important *economic benefits*. By giving patients a great experience while improving their oral health, a practice is able to become "the one they keep." A satisfied patient will not seek the services of another dentist, one that may not be as sensitive to their needs as you already are.

This goodwill will keep current patients happy and make them more likely to refer their dental office to people they care about. A word of mouth recommendation is priceless; testimonials from patient to friends and family has the capability to be more convincing than any paid advertising.

Moving toward *patient-focused care* helps to ensure patients schedule regular dental visits and see the dentist experience in a more *positive* light. Although some have elected to offer spa-like treatments to accomplish these goals, there are a number of easy and affordable alternatives that are just as effective.

CONTINUED ON PAGE THREE



CONTINUED FROM PAGE TWO

Going to the Dentist may not find itself on par with dinner at a fine restaurant, courtside seats at a basketball game, or a trip to Tahiti. But if you can offer even a little bit *more comfort and pleasure* to your patients, isn't that a good start?



Dental Health Services is proud to cheer on Lia Pernell — in the Olympics in Beijing this month.

Lia is the daughter of Gary Pernell, CEO & granddaughter of Dr. Godfrey Pernell, Founder of Dental Health Services

Lia is an example of continuous performance improvement—a goal we strive to achieve daily in our delivering of care and service. Join us in celebration of setting goals for our personal best!

Results

Lia Pernell makes her Olympic debut in 2008, rowing in the women's quadruple sculls. The seven-time national team member has rowed in four world championships and two world cups, never finishing out of the top ten. At the 2007 Worlds, she finished sixth in the quadruple sculls. Her most recent finish was a silver medal in the quadruple sculls at the 2008 World Cup stop in Lucerne.

Hard work and commitment

Her first years as a rower were hard, and she didn't enjoy the sport much. But she liked that she could see the results of her hard work: "I liked that it was hard and that I could beat people," she said. "It wasn't rowing that hooked me, but the competition. I liked the challenge and the simplicity."

Collegiate All-American

Pernell went on to row at Princeton University, where she was a three-time All-American and the captain of the varsity team in 2003.

The Doc is In

Patient Centered Practice — Stanley Ayers, DDS

The practice of dentistry has made many advances in the last 30 years. Microscopes for Endodontics, Masks and Gloves, digital X-rays, in office milled crowns and new restorative materials. The internet has also made communication faster and simpler as well as a resource for education on various topics including dentistry. As a result the public is better informed than ever before.

Now Patient Centered Healthcare (Practice) is taking the front seat. After all it is all about the patient. Here are some things you could implement in your practice to make your practice more "Patient Centered":

- Move to computerized dental records. The patient's record will be easy to read, easier to share information and coordinate care. Also studies have shown computerized records reduce mistakes.
- Communicate by email. Send email reminders about appointments, unfinished care and reminders for preventive care.
- Start a member survey to get feedback about your office.
- Don't keep patients waiting for long periods of time. They *really* do appreciate it when their time is respected.
- Make sure the patient is involved in their care and the decision making process—it is their body.

Patients have a much better success rate and compliance rate under such care!



How can we help you?

Do you have questions regarding Dental Health Services' **Quality Assurance Program** or any other services we provide?

Your Service Specialist is available to answer all of your questions!

