

# Look up to your dental receptionists!



Dental receptionists are exemplars of multi-tasking, says associate dentist **Sharif Islam**, and create the first impression on patients as they step through the surgery door.

**C**annon fodder. Not an especially appreciative way to describe our dental receptionists but it is often how some of them may feel. They are on the literal front line, the infantry of the battalion, set to intercept the ordnance of patient ire long before it dissipates *en route* to the surgery. And sitting behind a desk with only the new COVID screens as an additional physical barrier against the jaws of the oncoming onslaught.

I embellish, forgive me. The vast majority of patients are, of course, incredibly civilised and respectful, and only upset when they feel they have legitimate cause. It is far more typical for them to enjoy a friendly banter with our receptionists, and as such may offer some additional valuable insight into their lives that perhaps the practitioner may have missed.

And our receptionists are invariably welcoming and helpful, providing the first port of call for information and assistance long before the anxious patient has begun their long walk into the abyss. Their smiling faces and gentle tone do much to diffuse fear and uncertainty, preparing the visitor with essential confidence and reassurance.

It is therefore easy to overlook why the patient enters the surgery with much of their anxiety placated and even a spring in their step. And indeed, it is easy to forget just how much our receptionists have done before we've even had our first coffee at the start of the day.

For they are the exemplars of multi-tasking. From intercepting calls, writing emails, logging lab work and coordinating appointments to name but a few, their skillset is invaluable to any organisation. They are the first impression for the practice, both in person and on the phone,

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and their dedication to ensuring its excellence are the reason that patients flock to the door like moths to a flame.

It is not without its challenges, however. They are often called upon to have difficult conversations with our patients, usually on behalf of a meek and reticent dentist unwilling to do it themselves. It is unfortunately the receptionist that therefore absorbs and buffers the discontent from the other end of the line, before relaying the experience to a practitioner relieved that they didn't have to endure the same.

The receptionist frequently acts as the voice of the practice, the unofficial spokesperson that rephrases the dentist's petulant rant into a more diplomatic choice of words to the patient. Their soothing voice softens the screams pulsating through the walls, never lacking a single scintilla of sincerity when asking the poor, blood-soaked victim how their appointment went. And through intelligent and strategic negotiation they somehow always manage to secure the latest electric toothbrush without subjecting everyone to the obligatory lunch-and-learn from the dental reps. Marvellous.

If that wasn't impressive enough, many of our receptionists are also qualified dental nurses, disorienting the patient into a strange fever dream where the same face that greeted them at the front desk is now aspirating amalgam from their gullet. Soon thereafter the same face is taking their payment before they leave. The patient may wonder if they had just left a science fiction dystopia run by clones but we know better. Our ubiquitous receptionist was exercising the full spectrum of their innumerable abilities.

Rarely has an army succeeded in a campaign without either its infantry or elite forces. Our receptionists are the dental equivalent of both rolled into one. No practice can operate or hope to succeed without them. To say they are indispensable would be an understatement of galactic proportions.

*'All I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,'* wrote the poet John Masefield. Well, you have a tall ship and your receptionists are the stars. Look up to them, please.

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