Generating demand – the next challenge for dentistry

Dentistry is currently experiencing something of a rollercoaster ride. Whether it is the ongoing repercussions of the pandemic or navigating the rising costs of living, you need a solution that allows you to provide care and attention to your patients and the agility to tackle whatever the world throws at us!

As the world slowly emerged from lockdown, an enormous backlog of patients with unmet dental needs had built up. Worsened by the staff shortages, practices prioritised restorative treatments and waiting lists for routine care continued to build.

However, as the backlog of patients was slowly reducing, inflation increased, and today the country has entered its worst economic period for over 30 years – leaving patients and practices alike having to 'tighten their belts'. This leaves practices with four notable goals:

1. Attract new patients, thus increasing revenue and growth opportunities
2. Empower patients to take control of their oral health and encourage upkeep of their care cycle
3. Improve recall rates
4. Reduce the numbers of lapsed patients that has built up since the pandemic.

Attract new patients
A practice's online presence is key when attracting new patients. Search engine optimisation (SEO) can feel daunting, especially for practices that haven't updated their website recently, but did you know that reaching the top of Google's search results can be as simple as asking patients for a Google review?

- The more positive Google reviews a business accumulates, the easier it will be for new patients to find it online
- Recent reviews also make a practice look more attractive to prospective patients.

Using automated software to gather and manage reviews takes this task away from dentists and receptionists, streamlining workflows whilst ensuring that online reviews become an effective part of marketing for your practice: https://www.dentally.com/en-gb/product-features/dentally/integrations/workingfeedback.

Another step in attracting new patients is making it easy for them to book. In 2023, online booking is second nature to people in their everyday lives and for patients, it's no different: https://www.dentally.com/en-gb/product-features/dentally/online-booking. Whilst many practices choose the traditional method of booking by phone, this can be very time consuming, and more and more practices are discovering the benefits and convenience of online booking. Switching to this method not only reduces the number of inbound calls staff have to deal with, but it gives more time for them to focus on the patients in the practice.

Empower patients
The next challenge is patient retention, which ultimately comes down to providing an exceptional patient experience. All practices will benefit from stepping into the patient's shoes and considering the quality of the experience from start to finish. Begin with finding the practice online – was it easy? Do you feel confident that patients feel well cared for, and that all their questions are being answered at each touchpoint? Have they been followed up post treatment and would they recommend the practice to family and friends?

The single most important step practices can take to retain patients is to pre-book appointments before they leave the practice. COVID-19 caused a large interruption to the maintenance of patient's oral health, and some of those who were used to having pre-booked appointments, have simply not thought to book an appointment themselves. To re-engage with these patients, take a multi-channel approach – use SMS, email and letters on an automated schedule and don't be afraid to chase up patients that don't respond. Once patients are back into the practice, it's worth returning to the habit of pre-booking appointments.

Improve recall rates
For those patients who don't pre-book appointments, having an effective recall

system and ensuring high success rates is the single most important aspect of a practice's efficiency. Recall success ensures that surgeries are optimised and reduces white space in the diary. Automating this process also ensures that patients don't slip through the net and reduces reliance on individual members of the reception team.

Re-engage with lapsed patients
For those lapsed patients who haven't had an appointment in over two years, re-engagement requires some consideration for their feelings. Lapsed patients can often feel embarrassed about having left it so long. In which case, it's worth reaching out, breaking the stigma and subtly letting them off the hook. This can be as simple as a sending a friendly message acknowledging that they haven't been seen for a while and stressing that the practice has been working hard and is now returning to normal appointment intervals, so now's the time to book in. This period is an ideal time to bring the team together and identify any issues and carve out solutions. Talking to team members, particularly those who interact directly with patients, allows for a holistic understanding of the problem. After gathering the data and metrics, practices can then establish goals to re-engage lapsed patients, attract new ones and ultimately grow the business.

Discover how Dentally's cloud solution can help navigate your practice challenges. For more information or to speak to a consultant visit https://www.dentally.com/en-gb/.