

Does *your* practice need a treatment coordinator?

Create an opportunity for amazing practice growth, says **Tracy Ruck***.



** Tracy began her career in dentistry over 22 years as a dental nurse, gaining qualifications in dental radiography, oral health education and practice management. Tracy ran oral health clinics at three different practices and gave talks to local schools and clubs before taking on the role of treatment coordinator in a top Bristol cosmetic practice. Tracy now works as a Treatment Coordinator Consultant with Bobbi Anthony, teaching other practices how to develop the treatment coordinator role.*

Dentistry is fast paced and demanding and I'm sure we all wish we had a little more time in the day. Because we're so busy and often feel rushed, it can be difficult to build and maintain relationships with our patients ... especially to take the time required with new patients. If this is true in your practice, it may be time to consider the introduction of a treatment coordinator into your team.

Why do you need a treatment coordinator?

Regardless of the size of your practice, whether a large corporation or a small practice, a treatment coordinator (TC) can increase effective communication and business success. The actual duties of a TC can vary depending on the size of your practice but in general much of the non-clinical new patient communication and case closure can be absorbed by the treatment coordinator.

How do they do this? From an **administrative perspective**, TCs can manage much of the new patient phone time and online enquiries, coordinate appointments, assist in presenting and closing cases and make financial arrangements. This means more time for receptionists and practice managers to spend on their already busy job descriptions. From the **clinical perspective**, the TC can make the initial contact with patients at either a consultation or new patient examination, bond with patients, interview patients and gather preliminary information. In addition, TCs can discuss patient options, emphasise the dentists' experience and skill and even discuss possible fees. Consider how much time can be saved for the dentist when a complimentary consultation is done by a TC, and the dentist exam is not even scheduled until the patient

is pre-qualified - meaning they agree, in principle, with the treatment and want to move forward. Therefore, much dentist time that is normally spent with new patients can be used for clinical treatment time ... thus increasing the dentist's productivity.

What does it take to be a good treatment coordinator?

Being a great communicator is one of the key skills required by a TC. Combining this skill with an excellent understanding and knowledge of dentistry, your aim is to help the patient achieve their dental goals. In order to do this, you need to know what the patient wants, why they want it and what, if anything, would keep them from doing it. The TC must ask open ended questions to find out their patient's dental 'wants' and concerns. It's important to remember that this appointment is all about the patient, so communication isn't about just talking - it's about listening too. I suggest you take notes. I always do this and I think it shows patients I'm listening and I care. In addition, this is information you will need to remember when presenting treatment options and getting case closure. Ask what you can do for them; why are they here? They didn't just wake up today not liking their smile, so what is it, specifically, they don't like and why? Also ask why now are they thinking about making these changes ... and, did they ask their last dentist about it? By knowing all the right questions to ask and showing that you understand their concerns, you can build the trust with the patient. Trust is absolutely necessary if you are going to discuss a patient's desires, fears and finances.

Personality styles

Along with patient communication, a working knowledge of personality styles can be useful. Using the right 'style' of

communicating is as important as using the right 'words'. Some patients are always in a hurry and want to be informed quickly with a 'cut-to-the chase' style. Others may want more detailed information in a slower, more planned manner.

By recognising these different styles, you can immediately build rapport and trust with patients and help them to feel more in control of the time and communication. There are many different programmes that teach this type of knowledge. One such programme is the DiSC Styles (www.discstyles.com).

There are also technical skills that a TC must know. The TC normally takes a set of full mouth digital photographs (the number to be determined by the dentist). This provides a great opportunity to educate patients on their oral health and treatment options at their case presentation. Often the use of visual technology can become the integral component of success within this area of modern day practice.



Our patients must be able to clearly see their existing conditions, understand treatment recommendations and visualise the anticipated results before they can accept and approve treatment. By imaging the patient with computer technology, the TC can easily create a proposed aesthetic enhancement of the patient's smile at the consultation visit. New imaging software such as Envision a Smile (EAS) allows you to load a patient's photo and immediately demonstrate to the patient how a new smile might change their appearance. This is not only practical, but also a clinically sound tool for patient and laboratory communication.

Patient/dentist liaison

The TC also serves as a liaison between the patient and the dentist. Before seeing the patient the TC and dentist will have a short handover discussion. Using the photos, images and information gathered from the TC consultation, the dentist very quickly knows most of the information necessary about that patient. The TC can tell the dentist what the patient wants, what options have been explained, and the patient's response. Additionally, if necessary, the TC can inform patients of further options the dentist might feel are appropriate after the examination.

A TC can also be available to assist the dentist with the compilation of the treatment plan. A methodical approach to treatment planning is essential. The dentist and/or the TC must make sure the patient has been fully informed of treatment options, risks and benefits. Signed documentation of this understanding is necessary along with a signed 'Consent to Treat Form'. By working in this way you can make sure the patient is fully informed of all the options and potential complications involved in each treatment option. Again, all of this needs to be documented and can be part of the TC role.

Requirements for a good treatment coordinator:

- Outgoing personality
- Good working knowledge of dentistry
- Understanding of people and personalities (DiSC)
- Well trained in communication skills
- Good listener
- Understanding and well trained in technology
- Knowledgeable in treatment planning, risk management and case closure.

By introducing the TC role into your practice you can create an opportunity for

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amazing practice growth and, at the same time, reduce the day to day stress you all experience. By relieving administrators of many of the tasks required for scheduling and follow-up on new patients, they are free to spend more time in other areas of reception and customer service. In addition, since TCs are scheduled in non-clinical spaces, the dentists are free to do more productive patient care in their surgeries. Finally, since dentistry is becoming more and more competitive, it allows patients the opportunity to choose your practice over others because they understand that they can come for a complimentary (free) consultation without obligation and **then** determine if yours is the right practice for them. Pre-qualified patients are much more likely to say 'yes'.

Working as a TC gave me a new appreciation and enjoyment of dentistry. Training others in this role takes it to another level. Perhaps you might want to incorporate this new role into your team and take your practice to another level as well.

If you feel it could be time for your practice to consider the introduction of a TC into your team, or for more information on upcoming Comprehensive Care courses and in-house training, Tracy can be contacted on tracy@bobbianthony.com or by calling 07974 012542. www.bobbianthony.com