

EP. 13 How to Reduce Cancellations

We know that every broken appointment in the hygiene department could be worth \$150. That can add up to as much as \$30,000 a year! This doesn't even account for any treatment that might have been discovered and treatment planned in the hygiene chair. There are things that can be done to reduce cancellations, and the team should create strategies to overcome this common problem.

This is a multi-faceted issue and unfortunately there is no magic wand to solve it. However, there are many options to overcoming this problem, and today we will focus on the benefits of creating value in every aspect of the appointment. Patients who value the services they receive in your practice will be less likely to cancel. That value must be created before the patient is calling in to cancel an appointment.

This starts at the front desk. Patients, whether new or existing, should always be greeted warmly and with a smile. How are your patients received when they walk in? People are not impressed by what is expected. Make sure an effort is made to exceed expectations.

The front desk team should always be prepared for the patient's arrival. Don't drop the ball! Smile, go above and beyond to welcome the patient, and greet the patient by name. Using photos to identify patients in advance and recognizing them by name when they walk in goes a long way to developing and nurturing the relationship they have with you. Make sure the person who is greeting your patients is making them feel good about being in your practice every time. Patients who enjoy coming to your practice will keep coming back.

Value should continue to be the focus as the patient is moved to the clinical area. Many times we don't maximize value creation as much as we could. We often minimize what we do in the verbiage we choose: "a little bleeding", "just a cleaning". Watch your words.

One thing we encourage our clients to do is to use "when, what, and why" during and at the end of the appointment. Rather than just telling the patient "see you next time", you might say "Mrs. Jones, let's go ahead and reserve your six month preventive care visit. At that time, we will reassess those areas of sensitivity". This goes back to the when, what and why.

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Also, use the technology you have invested in to create value: your intraoral camera, digital X-rays, diagnodent, etc. You've made the investment; these tools should be used as much as possible.

Your front desk should also be able to confront the patients who call in to cancel. We can be blamed for the way our patients behave because we have allowed them to do it. If a patient cancels today, and we call them in tomorrow to fill an opening, it is implied that it's okay to cancel because we'll get you right back in soon. We let them off the hook too easily. By saying "I'm sorry to hear that you need to cancel, was there an emergency?" It is assumed that the only reason to cancel would be because of an emergency. Then ask them to keep the appointment that you no longer have time to fill. You might say "Dr. Jones has reserved this time just for you". It is very important to make sure your tone conveys concern during this conversation. Practice this!!

- 1. Consider how your practice is creating value from the moment the patient walks in the door.**
- 2. Be sure to use the tools you have invested in to create value for the services you offer. Do not minimize what you do by using the wrong verbiage.**
- 3. Is your front desk equipped with great verbiage to handle cancellation calls that lets patients know that time is reserved especially for them?**

If you have a cancellation problem, use these tips now. Retrain your patients to behave in a way that is beneficial for them and for your practice.