

## EP. 68 Are You Suffering from ECS (Empty Chair Syndrome)?

What we hear most often in the dental offices we train is that they are suffering from ECS (Empty Chair Syndrome). Everyone agrees: it's hard to reach goals when half our patients don't show!

I recently read an article that stated that, "Adults aren't visiting the dentist--- and no one knows why". It said that the percentage of adults who said they visited the dentist in the past year had remained flat for several years. This should lead us to re-think how to get adults, particularly younger adults, into dental chairs. The article went on to state that in a survey, only 11% cited cost as the barrier to getting dental care. So, while cost is still one of the top reasons adults report not getting dental care, fewer adults are reporting cost is a barrier to care.

If you know anything about what we teach, you know we always talk about "getting into your bubble" – putting your focus on things you can control and not on articles like these!

### What can you do to create value in your practice?

- **Are you utilizing all the tools you have available?** If you are only doing what insurance will cover or not allowing enough time per appointment to utilize the intra-oral camera, take blood pressure, do an oral cancer screening, education, etc., then the patient may feel they can do the same thing at home. Walk the patient through why coming to your office is important. If you don't show them your intra-oral pictures, you may as well not take them. If you don't tell them what to listen for before probing, they are not co-diagnosing with you.
- **Are you asking for referrals?** The best way to get new patients is to ask a great patient to send their family and friends. These people will already have a connection to your practice that one who "googles" you or sees you bill board won't have, and hopefully that makes them more apt to show up. But you have to ask!
- **Are you maximizing your marketing efforts?** Are your team members who answer your phones well trained to ensure that every call becomes a patient who will fill your chair?
- **How are you handling cancellation calls?** If you are just letting the patient off the hook, what they hope you will do, you now have to scramble to fill that open spot—maybe last minute. Instead, plan for how to confront that patient and ask them to keep the reservation they had previously agreed to.
- **Are new and existing patients aware of what you have to offer in the practice?** They may not know unless you tell them. Don't wait for patients to ask if you offer a particular service—share what you think they could benefit from, or that they might tell their family and co-workers about.

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- **Are you making it easy and convenient to do business with you?** Be able to overcome any barriers, whether they be cost, fear, time, etc. This may include payment options such as credit plans or in-office savings plans, extended hours, ease of making an appointment—can your patients book appointments online?

Don't listen to the gloom and doom you may hear in the media. Use the information to your benefit by taking control and overcoming those reasons patients may not be in your chair. If this is an issue in your practice, plan a team meeting to discuss the things you can do proactively to overcome the "empty chair syndrome."