

EP. 9 Communication and Handoffs

- What is a handoff?
- The Rule of Seven
- Benefits of a Proper Handoff
- How to Handoff
- What are the Benefits of Doing This Well?

- What is a handoff?

A hand-off is the passing of information from one person to another. So, in your case, this could be passing info to your patient, then passing that convo to your Dr. during the hygiene evaluation, then perhaps reiterating that info with the patient another time, then handing the info off in the patients presence to the treatment and/or financial coordinator.

- The Rule of Seven

The Rule of Seven is an old marketing adage that states that someone needs to hear your message at least seven times before they take action. The truth behind it is that you can't tell someone once and then be done. (And if you have a spouse or children, you know this also applies here!) If you have a marketer in your practice, this would be good for them to know. But it's also very applicable with your patients because hearing what they need in a consistent manner, and several times will prompt them to take action.

- Benefits of a Proper Handoff

*The patient knows they have been heard and don't have to repeat themselves, or wonder if the message has been conveyed. When they hear you tell the Dr. their concerns, what you've discussed with them up to now, point out the xrays, hear you say you did an oral cancer screening, etc., there is no doubt that you didn't miss anything. Having the patient hear over and over what they need and why helps to solidify their decision to commit to treatment. Tying back to Rule of Seven—1.) they hear Hyg. say what they need, 2.) hear handoff to Dr., 3.) Dr. confirms, 4.) Hyg. reviews again and reiterates, 5.) then Handoff to FD. That's 4-6 times patient hears a consistent message. Repetition is key.

*Confused people don't buy. Patients who leave without an appointment even though any barriers have been overcome may not have completely understood exactly. Your very well-executed hand off can help with this.

- How to Handoff

There should be a consistent handoff among each team member. Create a checklist of what information will be covered in the handoff. Include what the patient said, what was discovered during the hygiene appointment or time with assistant, and recommendations made. The Doctor should allow the time to make sure this is done before jumping in. I have called this a well-choreographed dance between the clinician and Dr.

- What are the benefits of doing this well?

The handoff will increase the trust the patient has in the practice and providers because they know that everyone is on the same page and that they have been heard. In hearing the "diagnosis" and treatment recommendation over and over they see that it is in their best interest to follow through. It reinforces the relationship with the patient, and that is one of the most important reasons patients come to you-- the relationship.