

The secret tool: patient questionnaire

A powerful way to find out exactly what your patients want so you can boost your income and patient base

By Dr. Bhavna Doshi, United Kingdom

Have you ever thought of what it would be like if you could discover the hidden pains your patients go through daily because of their teeth?

The kind of deep-rooted pain patients often don't mention and occasionally don't realise they are even suffering with. These pains may be so deeply embedded that it never occurs to them they may have a way out.

Many patients regularly suffer from cosmetically debilitating features of their mouths. Most of these patients often suffer silently because they believe that there are no solutions to their problems or think they can't afford it.

They think having their mouths completely, once-and-for-all "fixed" is something that is for the rich and famous.

My experience with treating "Extreme Makeover UK" patients has confirmed my thoughts of how

much people suffer in silence with negative beliefs.

Uncovering hidden pains

The tool to help diagnose the required and much needed dentistry for patients is the patient questionnaire. This may sound simple, yet its effects are immeasurable. It can be designed to be as intricate or simple as you want.

For example, it can contain a series of beautiful photographs of the applications of cosmetic

dentistry.

This can be your work or that of others — it simply visualises the possibilities for the patient. But more importantly, it must contain thought-provoking questions that allow your patients to focus on their cosmetic concerns.

The questionnaire should be strategically designed to root out the major concerns patients may have. It forms part of a discovery process between you and your patients in making your patients aware of their fears, wants, desires and needs.

It can form part of a beautiful patient-friendly package. This means there is no work for you to do except have an informative discussion with your patients about their response to the questions.

What should you ask?

Simple thought-provoking questions need to be mentioned in the questionnaire. It needs to be used as a regular tool in your practice.

Every practice member must understand its significance and be able to talk to the patient about its importance in discovering his/her needs and the overall evaluation process.

Sample questions

- Do you have any concerns in your mouth?
- If you had a magic wand and could change something in your mouth, what would you change?
- What do you like about your mouth and smile?
- What don't you like about your mouth and smile?
- What is the most important thing to you about your mouth and smile?
- Are there any aspects of dentistry you have been thinking about that you would like to discuss?

Maximising performance

Sit down (in a preferably nonclinical environment) with the patient for a consultation. Systematically go through each question on the card and ask why the patient gave that particular answer.

Use the pleasing photographs of the various smiles and cosmetic work you may have done in the past to ask what the patient is looking for in a nice smile.

If you could have extra-oral and intra-oral photographs taken beforehand of your patient, this would really optimise and visually reinforce your solutions to the patient.

For example, if you had a photograph of a markedly deteriorating restoration in an anterior tooth, it would be easier to justify the need for a new, cosmetically-improved

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and protective restoration on that tooth. Especially if this was a concern the patient expressed in his/her answers to the questionnaire.

You will find after this discovery process that you will be able to advise a lot more than you would have initially. This process allows you to better understand your patients so that you can take better care of them. It helps to build a rapport and a long-term relationship of trust and faith.

Many times patients require an authoritative person who would simply listen to them. This act alone, if sincere, is enough to build trust for patient loyalty. It also is a major factor in influencing patients to accept treatment recommendations.

Income generation

This patient questionnaire would allow you to generate more revenues because it would act like an extra activity in marketing your practice or you.

It is a well-known fact in the marketing arena that the more activities you perform, the greater the number of potential customers you are likely to attract. This methodology is a simple but extremely effective system to acquire new revenue sources.

It can be applied to both existing patients and new patients alike.

The process itself is one of discovery, and other aspects of dentistry can come to light as a result of this investigative procedure. The more comprehensive the dentistry you provide your patients, the more dentistry you do, hence the more income you generate.

Patients that have developed a good relationship with you as a result of being listened to will be happy customers of the ser-

vices you provide. Happy customers are more likely to refer other income-generating patients like themselves.

Don't underestimate this tool

The patient questionnaire is a dynamic marketing tool. It can promote your work and develop your practice by giving you the ability to grow and generate income.

It is a diagnostic tool to help you and your patients on the road to discovering your patients' needs and requirements.

The closer you are to meeting those needs and requirements, the greater is the likelihood that your patients will accept your treatment recommendations.

This in turn will allow you to promote your dentistry and generate more income.

Uncover the successful and effortless nature of this tool by simply using it to unveil the hidden dentistry. **DT**

About the author



Bhavna Doshi is a senior dentist at The Perfect Smile Studios, www.theperfectsmileacademy.co.uk. She has a special interest and focus on practice productivity, marketing and growth strategies.

If you have enjoyed this article and would like a free leaflet on "Cost-effective Marketing for Dental Practices," then e-mail Doshi at bhavna@unlimitednewpatients.com with your name and address.

Fight oral cancer!

Did you know that dentists are one of the most trusted professionals to give advice?

Thus, no other medical professionals are in a better position to show patients that they are committed to detecting and treating oral cancer.

Prove to your patients just how committed you are to fighting this disease by signing up to be listed at www.oralcancerselfexam.com. This new Web site was developed for consumers in order to show them how to do self-examinations for oral cancer.

Self-examination can help your patients to detect abnormalities or incipient oral cancer lesions early. Early detection in the fight against cancer is crucial and a primary benefit in encouraging your patients to engage in self-examinations.

Secondly, as dental patients become more familiar with their oral cavity, it will stimulate them to receive treatment much faster.

Conducting your own inspection of patients' oral cavities provides the perfect opportunity to mention that this is something they can easily do themselves as well.

You can explain the procedure in brief and then let them know about the Web site, www.oralcancerselfexam.com, that can provide them with all the details they need.

If dental professionals do not take the lead in the fight against oral cancer, who will? And in the eyes of our patients, they likely would not expect anyone else to do so — would you?

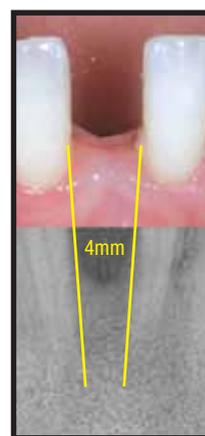
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