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It Is All About Communication

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IT IS ALL ABOUT COMMUNICATION

Dr. Paul T. Olenyn; Chair, VDA Council on Peer Review

The patient-dentist relationship is an extraordinarily complex relationship. Dentists are trusted to provide the “accepted” standard of care. This obligation involves informing the patient of their dental health, providing optimal treatment, referring if necessary and obtaining the patient’s informed consent. The keyword in this relationship is “trust.” Trust requires effective communication. Communication decreases patient complaints and increases patient compliance with your recommendations. This all leads to more successful outcomes. Patients also expect the dentist to be interested in them as an individual and to listen to them so that their fears and concerns can be addressed.

I have noticed over the years that more patients are concerned about how they are treated as individuals. Patients often complain that they are rushed to sign consent forms or do not have a patient advocate present during these discussions.

Communication with the front desk is also a problem for patients. Patients feel that they cannot get help regarding fees or insurance.

These patient frustrations can be overcome by showing empathy and carefully listening to our patients’ concerns. Patients are far more likely to follow our recommendations when they feel we are truly listening.

Make sure your recommendations are easily understood and not filled with complex dental terminology. Supply your patients with a written explanation of the reason for your recommendation and the time necessary to complete their treatment plan. Open communication

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between both parties will alleviate many misunderstandings.

Effective communication skills are imperative. Communication should be simple enough to be understood by all. It is not always what we say, but how we say it and how the patient interprets what was said.

A friendly environment where the dentist and staff show a direct interest in the patient by attentively listening to and answering all the patient’s concerns leads to a happy long-lasting and successful relationship.

MEMBER RESOURCE

The ADA Guidelines for Practice Success™ (GPS™) module on Managing Patients offers numerous articles and resources that can help you build strong relationships with patients. Key articles in that module include:

- The Patient’s First Visit
- Informed Consent/Refusal
- Specialty Referrals
- Documentation/Patient Records
- Noncompliance
- Complaints
- Refunds and Discounts
- Patient Dismissal

