

Eliminating a Major Barrier to Patients Accepting Implant Treatment

Implant News and Views

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Your patients come to your office seeking the latest high tech dental procedures available. They want to have a beautiful smile. They have been referred to you or sought you out on their own, because of your ability to provide them with the kind of dentistry they want. These patients who are in your office asking questions about implant dentistry, are seeking the answers to dental problems that conventional dentistry can not solve for them. They have dental situations that cannot be solved with a simple crown or bridge. They want to enjoy having teeth again.

It is our job in the dental profession to educate them regarding the dental procedures that they need. To give a comprehensive exam, and present them with the best dental procedures that we know are available to meet their dental needs. We then are able to let our patient decide what treatment makes them most comfortable. I know that in presenting treatment plans, there have been times, when I have pre-judged a patient by their appearance and felt uncomfortable presenting a large dollar treatment plan to them. This is a mistake many practices make in presenting treatment plans.

Certainly in the business world, outside dentistry, they do not pre-judge you. As long as you have cash, credit cards or can make the payments they will sell you whatever you want. If we in dentistry would start presenting our treatment plans in terms of monthly payments or even "six months same as cash", I think we would schedule more cases. We live in a "monthly payment" society today.

Financial payment options in your practice can be a wall keeping your patients from accepting your treatment plans. You need to be sure you offer a range of options. With the variety of options available, you will be able to provide any of your patients with a means to pay for their dentistry that will be comfortable for them.

A \$4000 treatment plan could be presented as \$107 a month over 48 months at 11.99%. Interest rate is less than most credit cards. Or the even larger treatment plans, \$12,500, look better when presented as \$281 per month for 60 months at 11.99% interest.

Dental Fee Plan, 888-337-4171, is one of the many payment plan programs available to dentistry. Dental Fee Plan has been around for years, but has been available only to orthodontists. One third of the orthodontists nationwide have been using this plan to aid their patients in financing. The introduction to the rest of the dental profession has been recent. DFP provides you with a way to make loans available to your patients starting at \$1500.

DFP provides great support and training materials. When I contacted them, our area a local representative brought lunch in for the staff and did an in-office training session so all staff would understand how their service works. They provide you with laminated sheets that break down the amounts to be financed, time of loans, interest rates, and monthly payments. You do not have to do any calculations, they have it all done for you.

As a staff member, one of the real down sides of outside financing is the fact that your patient completes and returns to the office an application with very personal information. I work hard to build relationships with my patients, and now seeing all that personal information makes me uncomfortable. This is where DFP is so great. There are no applications to be processed through the office. I simply give the patient DFP's toll free number. The patient can call from our office or the privacy of their own home to get approval on financing. There is a form that is sent to our office to verify treatment to be done and amount. We simply sign and return the form to DFP.

Payments are made to the practice by DFP by check or direct deposit minus a 7.5% administrative fee. This payment is sometimes received in our office before treatment has even started. Most payments are sent within 24hrs of receipt of the signed form, indicating treatment is being completed. This payment is without future recourse to the practice. If patients do have any problem with keeping up with their payments, DFP treats your patients with courtesy and respect.

In our practice we also use American General Finance, 800-453-2017, for treatment plans from between \$300 to \$1500. There is a short credit application that the patient must complete and return to your office. I then fax a copy of the application to our local American General office for approval. A verbal approval is usually made within a half hour of the fax. I then write up the contract detailing monthly payments, no interest and an exact length of the contract. The patient then signs and I forward the original application along with two copies of the contract to American General. The office then receives a check by mail in 3-5 working days. This program involves the practice receiving 94% of the fee. The patient has six months to pay the balance off with no

interest.

When your practice is seeking outside financing plans to offer your patients, one of the first questions is what is the cost going to be to the practice. In our office we signed up and actually paid a start of fee with one of the better done names out there. I signed up on the referral of another practice. When it came to using the plan, the percentage that it cost the practice was so astronomical, I never wanted to offer this option to our patients. We had the plan explained to us by their trainer who failed to lay ALL the costs out clearly. We actually had to threaten to take legal action against the company to get our set up fee back. So take care. I feel some of the best plans out there have no set up fees and charge the dentist 4-7% of total dollar amount financed by the patient. Secondly, you need to look at the ease which patients are approved. Outside financing is only good if your patients can actually get approved to use it. Thirdly, you need to be sure that the outside financing company treats your patients with respect. And last but certainly most important the amount of turn around time it takes to get the money back into the practice.

We also offer our patients the ability to use all the major credit cards including American Express. Many of them take advantage of air miles. Of course cash and check are always accepted as payment in full the day of service.

To have payment options be successful in your practice, it is absolutely essential that your staff believe in your payment options. They need to have the appropriate verbal skills to use when presenting these to your patients. Scripting is a great way to accomplish this. That way everyone has the same answers for the questions your patients may ask. How could a patient not accept this:

"Mrs. Smith, Dr. XYZ tells me we are going to go ahead with your treatment plan. He was showing me your case yesterday, what a beautiful smile you going to have when he is finished. He does such a great job, you will be so pleased. The total cost for your treatment is \$5000.00. Would you like to take advantage of our 5% courtesy allowance by paying with cash or check the day of service?" Mrs. Smith replies, "Oh, gosh that is a lot of money, I am not sure what to do. Can't I make monthly payments like I have in the past?" "I would be happy to help you with that Mrs. Smith, your monthly payment could range from \$150 to \$300 depending on the length of time you want to spread the payments over. Here is the telephone # of the company we work with to do all our outside billing. You do not have to fill out any forms, you just call their toll free number and they will assist you. If you have any questions please call me so I can help you."

There are so many different ways these payment options can be presented to your patients. It is very important that you all do it the same way and make the patient understand you are there to help them. Your staff is your link to your patients and their accepting treatment. Give them the knowledge and skills they need to help your patients find ways to afford the dental care they want and deserve. A great source for teaching these verbal skills and scripting is "Office Magic", Patrick Wahl and Lorraine Hollett, they can be reached at 800-750-8779. When patients know that you have the ability to make dentistry affordable to them, they start actually asking for treatment they may have put off in the past.

Once you have taken yourself out of the banking business you can concentrate on what you do best...DENTISTRY.

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