

CREATING DENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

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Hygienists can be incredibly effective at enrolling the long-term patient in one or two crowns from the Hygiene chair. However, most Hygienists are challenged with how to go about discussing full-mouth comprehensive care during a re-care visit. We know the Doctor expects it; however, it is not expected by the patient, and often comes across as a sales pitch. In fact, most patients have a difficult time considering thousands of dollars in Dentistry when presented by the Hygienist during a one-hour, sixty-five dollar cleaning. Implementing the and creating a 'Dental Health & Wellness' system will help alleviate the various problems inherent in encouraging patients to plan for comprehensive care through state-of-the-art dentistry.

Consider this...how many thousands of dollars in previously diagnosed, yet still incomplete, treatment plans are sitting in your filing cabinet? When will you see those patients again to discuss their recommended treatment? Most likely, at the patient's next Hygiene visit. In fact, some patients faithfully see the Hygienist (many as frequently as four times a year), and still they have incomplete treatment.

Let's take a look at why this occurs. On the day of the Hygiene visit, we review patients' charts at the morning meeting. We identify those who have outstanding treatment. The Hygienist reviews the treatment with the patient, uses visual aids, discusses benefits, and tries to build the value of the needed treatment. Remember, the patient is here for a *cleaning*, not a comprehensive diagnosis. When the Doctor arrives for the exam, he supports the Hygienist and provides another diagnosis for what's previously been treatment planned. We believe the patient needs the treatment. In fact, we may even get the impression that the patient is ready to start the treatment, commit to a financial arrangement, and leave today with an appointment.

This same patient gets to the desk and says, "I need to talk to my husband before I do this," or, "You know, these teeth really aren't bothering me, I think I'll wait," or, better yet, "I can't do this until I know how much my insurance is going to pay: can you file a pre-determination for me?" One way or another, the administrator finds themselves trying to bring the patient *back* to clinical value, while the patient is *trying to get out the door*. The actual results are "charts-full" of incomplete treatment.

So, instead, let's take a different approach! In addition to the Hygienist reviewing treatment, using visuals, discussing benefits and building the value of the comprehensive treatment, many patients need additional extended time with the Doctor to solidify the case acceptance. However, don't underestimate the value of a Team approach to comprehensive care! Case acceptance for comprehensive care is a process: every value statement, every testimonial from a Team Member, every ounce of five-star service a patient receives, is a another step towards closure. So, if the patient is not ready to move forward with the care from the hygiene chair, the next step for (interested) patients is additional patient mentoring by the Doctor in the *doctor* chair.

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First, ask yourself when the last time was that this patient had a full series of diagnostic films and some *quality* time with the Doctor (something other than a periodic exam)? Depending on how long this patient has been in your practice, this could have been many years ago.

Second, consider setting aside one or two hours per week (pre-blocked on the Doctor’s schedule) for a ‘Dental Health and Wellness Visit.’ This time is specifically designed for the Doctor and the *interested* patient to discuss the health and wellness benefits available to the patient and their families through today’s Dentistry.

Okay, so how do we get there from here? How can we generate excitement and interest in full-mouth comprehensive care? How do we change the patient’s mindset towards comprehensive Dentistry? Let’s take a look at one option:

In the morning huddle, select a patient (or two) from the Hygiene schedule who is due for a full series of films, and has incomplete dentistry on their treatment plan. At the beginning of the Hygiene visit, take a few moments to discuss the five ‘E’s with those patients:

- 1) **Excitement** over the advances in Dentistry, which can provide additional health benefits (share a personal/patient’s experience).
- 2) **Examples** of two or three of these advances and how they can be health-related (use the intra-oral camera to show the patient their areas of need, avoiding single tooth remarks).
- 3) **Extend** a *‘special invitation’* from the Doctor to take advantage of an opportunity to come back and *explore the options* of how these advances could provide another level of health and wellness for them (use other visual aids; photos, models, Surgeon General’s Report, AAP Fact Sheets, Casey System, etc.).
- 4) **Explain** what will happen during the visit. Incorporate ‘knock-their-socks-off customer service’ (use a list of procedures to build value – the charge is for the FMX only; set it high enough for your comfort level).
- 5) **Expect** a positive response from the patient. If the patient is not interested at this time, ask if you can discuss it again during their next visit.

**These are the five ‘E’s’.*

During today’s periodic exam, the Hygienist informs the Doctor she/he has given the invitation to the patient, and tells the Doctor the patient’s response. When the patient *is* going to come back, the Doctor expresses excitement over the opportunity to spend more time with the patient, and briefly reviews restorative/aesthetic options today. If you have imaging, the Doctor should

ask the Hygienist to take a digital photo of the patient before they leave today. That way the imaging will be complete prior to their ‘Dental Health & Wellness Visit.’

If the patient isn’t interested, it is a very clear signal for the Doctor *not* to spend extended time trying to re-enroll the *uninterested patient* in comprehensive treatment. At that point, the Doctor would simply re-diagnose the need for the incomplete treatment. Either way, the Doctor isn’t taking valuable time away from the patient who is waiting in *his* treatment room.

Upon completion of the Hygiene appointment and the handoff to his/her Administrator, the patient is scheduled for the extended visit with the Doctor. Each office must design a template that works for the culture of their practice. However, here are a few suggestions to assist you in developing your own:

- Have a clear understanding of each team members’ role in the appointment.
- Have a previously imaged photo of the patient up on the monitor *before* they are seated in the treatment room.
- Schedule the patient with an RDA 30-minutes prior for an FMX and overview (build value) of what is included. Use intra-oral camera or show Casey while waiting on films.
- The Doctor should introduce the patient to the *philosophical changes* that have occurred for him personally and in his practice, as well as the *technical advances* currently available.
- Provide the patient with a ‘comprehensive exam’ (like you would with a New Patient).
- Make it *affordable* (through third-party financing) for the patient to move forward with comprehensive care.
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This becomes a very exciting *opportunity* for your existing patients to explore Dental Health and Wellness through state-of-the-art dentistry! Many of them will discover that they have the desire to improve their health and extend the life of their teeth. All that remains is for us to help them achieve their desires.



Many of our clients are experiencing new opportunities to help existing patients by taking a different approach in their Hygiene Department. I am confident that this will work for you, too.

If we can assist you in the implementation of your Dental Health and Wellness Visit through hands-on coaching, please give our office a call.

We wish you the best of luck!