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Providing better aftercare

08 Oct 2015

By Michael Sultan

You have taken on a case, diagnosed the patient's problem, discussed their options and gained their informed consent to proceed. The treatment has gone well and the patient leaves your clinic, a little numb admittedly, but in good spirits. You are satisfied you have done everything you can for them.

But there is just one thing missing: aftercare. Or proper aftercare, at least. An unfortunate majority of dental professionals seem to believe that aftercare consists simply of handing a patient an advice leaflet as they head out the door and booking them in for a follow-up appointment.

But there has to be more than this.

When I first set up my practice, we made the effort to contact every patient after treatment, just to assess their recovery and assuage any concerns they might have had after returning home. For the most part, the patients appreciated this – they were happy we rang because it showed we cared about their progress. Some, however, were immediately suspicious and thought perhaps we were ringing to tell them about a problem with their treatment. The majority of people were simply surprised we had phoned at all, because no one had ever done it before.

This possibly stems from the fact that we have become so invested in the time-honoured maxim that 'no news is good news.' Surely, we think, our patients will contact us if there is something wrong.

But the fact is, they probably won't. Whether it's because they are embarrassed or they think we're too busy to talk to them, most patients will suffer in silence.

This is, of course, a fundamental failing in our role as healthcare providers. We need to care for our patients until they are well again, not just until they walk out our door. Admittedly, trying to call each and every patient can be a time-consuming task, especially for larger practices. It can also be utterly superfluous, if only a handful of patients actually need additional attention.

What is needed, therefore, is an overhaul of current aftercare procedure. We need a way of targeting those patients who need our help and reassurance. With modern technology being what it is, this surely cannot be difficult to achieve. I imagine apps that can track patients' post-treatment pain in real time, helping us recognise trends and deliver precise assistance to those who need it most; I can see text services and instant messaging being integrated into dentistry to provide personalised aftercare for all patients.

This would surely improve our profession, not just in standards of care, but in reputation – just imagine the positive response your patients will offer when they know that you genuinely care about their progress and wellbeing?

And if that isn't incentive enough to improve our aftercare, I don't know what is.



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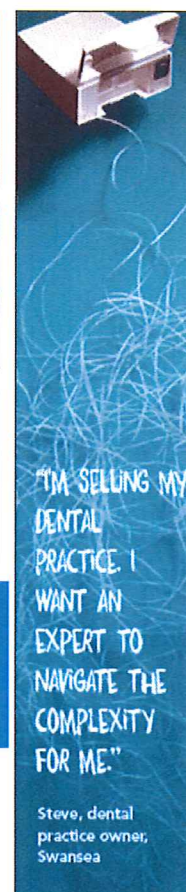


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