



Blind Spots in Dentistry™: Uncovering the “Hidden Treasure” in Your Patient Charts

By Jan Keller

Dental practices spend a lot of time and money to attract new patients, as they should. What many fail to realize, however, is the true number of patients they lose every year by focusing more on attracting new patients than implementing a good recare system to keep existing patients active and involved in their own oral health, and in your practice.

Some loss is unavoidable. Under normal circumstances an attrition rate of 3-5% a year is typical. A practice with 1,200 active patients, for instance, should expect to lose up to 60 of those patients a year, on average. People move, pass away, change insurance carriers or bargain shop, for instance. But that still leaves a large percentage of patients who simply fade away. They walk out, never come back, and take a significant amount of your bottom line with them.

If this is happening in your practice, you're not alone. The good news is that you can minimize your rate of patient attrition by focusing on a source of 'hidden treasure' you may not even be aware of. I'm talking, of course, about...

Your patient charts.

When was the last time you conducted an in-depth review of patient charts, and the hidden treasure they hold in terms of incomplete, delayed or simply routine treatment?

For instance, how many of your patients are in need of updated x-rays? How many need a restoration, but have fallen through the cracks, either because they did not schedule at the time the treatment plan was presented, or because they cancelled their appointment and were never re-scheduled?

Successful offices use a tickler system to follow up on incomplete treatment, and with patients needing to re-schedule treatment. Just as important, they do NOT wait until late in the year to contact patients regarding unused insurance benefits.

You can uncover the hidden treasure in your patient charts by following a simple three-step process:

1. Audit your patient charts NOW for recommended treatment that has not been scheduled or completed.
2. Put a plan in place to contact these patients and give them an opportunity to complete treatment. Emphasize that it would be a good idea to act before additional treatment becomes necessary, or becomes more expensive.
3. Use your internal credit guidelines to support your staff in successfully negotiating payment arrangements that offer flexible and affordable payment options.

In other words, do everything you can to help your patients say 'yes' to needed or delayed treatment. While it's highly unlikely they will pick up the phone and call you, but they will appreciate you taking the time to follow up with them, regardless of their decision.

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