Checklist

5 STRATEGIES TO ELIMINATE HYGIENE CANCELLATIONS AND NO-SHOWS

It's a known fact that hygiene appointments in a dental practice are somewhat hit and miss. Patients tend to show up more often for their doctor appointments than their hygiene appointments, and around the world, hygiene cancellation or no-shows have become a recurring phenomenon.

Use this checklist to learn how to not only reduce hygiene cancellations/no-shows but to virtually eliminate them.

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STRATEGY #1: SET EXPECTATIONS WITH YOUR PATIENTS

Doctors, if you’re having trouble with high cancellation and no-show rates, could it be that you’ve trained your patients to treat their appointments casually?

One of the things we do at my practice, Life Smiles Dental Care is that we set our expectations with our patients. We do this during our new patient interview so that both the patient and our team are on the same page.

At the end of a typical new patient interview, our new patient coordinator would explain exactly what the patient can expect from our practice. For example, our coordinator at Life Smiles would share something like this; "Number one, you can expect us to provide the highest quality dental care available because that's the way we treat our patients. Number two, you can expect us to treat you like we would treat our family members. Number three, you can expect us to stand behind our work. If anything isn't right, up to our standards we redo it until it is right. And number four, you can expect to be able to reach the doctors after hours if there ever is a dental emergency that requires immediate attention."

Once the new patient coordinator has shared what the patient can expect from us, she will follow up by asking the patient, "..may I take a minute and share what we can expect from you?"
The psychology here is that we give them four things but we only ask them for one thing in return so it comes out as a very fair-minded exchange.

It is at this point that we set our expectations by sharing with our patients that we expect them to show up for any appointments that they schedule in our office. We also add to this that we understand that there are times when they would need to change their appointment and so we request that they give us at least 48 hours notice to change any appointments.

This is one of the main strategies we use at our practice to continue our high show-up rate of 97% in hygiene appointments.
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STRATEGY #2: CONSIDER OFFERING A WARRANTY FOR RESTORATIVE DENTISTRY IN YOUR PRACTICE

At our practice Life Smiles, we offer a warranty that varies anywhere from five to eight years, depending on the material and the procedure.

Doctors, you will want to check this with your state board to make sure you can do this in your area. We can do this since our practice is located in Arizona and so we provide a written warranty to our patients that states that we stand behind our work and that if anything isn't right, we will redo it.

Our warranties have two lines of fine print at the bottom. The first states that the warranty does not cover any accidents and the second line states that for the warranty to be in place, the patient will have to keep their recommended hygiene appointments.

Written warranties such as this are a great way to encourage your patients to keep their recommended hygiene appointments.

STRATEGY #3: CONSIDER INCENTIVIZING

Another great way to eliminate hygiene no-shows in your practice is to offer an incentive to your patients. Consider a whitening for life program that gives your patients an incentive to keep their hygiene appointments.

Whitening is a gateway service in a dental practice; you whiten anyone's teeth and they become better patients.

One of the things we offer our patients at Life Smiles is the concept of whitening for life. This means that any patient for whom we make custom whitening trays, get a free touch-up gel from us during their hygiene appointment as long as they keep their recommended hygiene appointments.

As an additional incentive, we even give away one or two syringes of white, depending on the patient's food habits.

Practices that have adopted this strategy have reported saving up to five cancellations a week on average!
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- **STRATEGY #4: SET UP A SECOND CONFIRMATION SYSTEM IN YOUR PRACTICE FOR AT-RISK PATIENTS**

At-risk here doesn't mean medically at-risk patients but rather those patients that are at risk of not showing up for their appointments. Your team members already know who these patients are based on their past behavior.

At Life Smiles, we start confirming two weeks out and the idea is that you shape those patients out of the bushes before they cancel or don't show up.

Setting up a separate confirmation system for your at-risk patients can be done through a variety of ways. We do ours through WEAVE where we have a separate confirmation system for our at-risk patients that allows us to get advance notice so that we can fill that time instead of having to deal with the cancellation or no-show right at that moment.

- **STRATEGY #5: DEVELOP AN ASAP PROTOCOL THAT YOU CAN DO TO FILL LAST-MINUTE RESCHEDULING APPOINTMENTS**

This strategy works anytime you have at least an hour's notice of a patient no-show. Here's how it works;

Set up a list of ten to twelve patients that you will send a text message to that goes something like, "Hi Rob, Kelly our hygienist could see you this afternoon at two. I thought of you first, let me know if you'd like that appointment. First come first serve."

Now here's the important part. Half of the people on that list should be patients who you know would like to be seen sooner and the other half of those people should be patients that are chronic cancellation and no-show patients.

When it comes to no-show patients, when any of them call to schedule an appointment, our coordinator would usually say something like, "I can't make any more appointments for you because we make them and you
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don’t show up” and every time we’ve had that conversation, patients would own up and say, "I know".

So then our coordinator would say to them, "Tell you what, we care about you and we don’t want you to slip through the cracks so I’m going to put you on my VIP list and let me tell you what that means. I’m not going to make an appointment for you but if something opens up, I’m going to send you a text message to let you know when we could see you. If it works for you great, if not, no harm no foul."

This way, these chronic cancellation patients make up the second half of our list and most often we find that those patients who can’t manage an advance schedule respond very well when given short notice.

We discuss this topic and action steps in greater detail in episode #46 of the Less Insurance Dependence podcast. Listen to the Less Insurance Dependence Podcast for more in-depth information at www.lessinsurancedependence.com