So why use scripts?

Using scripts will enable your team to clearly and consistently express your practice’s commitment when it comes to meeting your patient’s needs or even exceeding their expectations.

Remember that great customer service is not only about what you do, it is just as much about what you say and how you say it!

Find time to catch up with your team to do some brainstorming or ask them to write down all patient related scenarios they come across frequently, especially those they struggle with or even find it rather stressful.

Use the scenarios your team has identified in your next Team Training Session and practice them through a role-play with each other. This will create great fun for your team and will encourage individual contribution towards the desired outcome. Working on this by involving all of your team will identify and develop problem-solving processes and create excellent communication and patient care standards.

I have outlined some of the examples below of situations you should consider having scripts for:

**Answering the phones**

- **Greeting message** - everyone must answer the phone using the same greeting and introduce themselves with a smile, slowly and clearly.

- **Explaining about different treatments** - know the stages and time frames between appointments and what each appointment involves so post and pre-operative care instructions can be provided by reception team as well. Aim to demonstrate your team’s competence throughout! Trust me, your patients will not leave without noticing this, they will be impressed!

- **Convincing patients to keep their appointments** - ensure patients understand the importance and value of their appointment. This particularly relates to hygienist appointments, regular check-ups and simple restorations which are clinically necessary without cosmetic value. Patients often either do not see the urgency or does not consider it to be of a high value treatment. In such cases reception team may need to dramatize the benefits of the services by using the “power words” (fantastic dentist, great with nervous patients or children, amazing results, very gentle hygienist” to describe them. They are powerful motivators for your patients! The outcome of delaying or not having treatment also needs to be highlighted.

**Appointment Scheduling**

- **Handling DNA’s or late attendance for appointment**

- **Dealing with last minute cancellations**

- **Dealing with patient who turned up but has no appointment booked**

- **Identifying real dental emergencies that require same day appointment**

- **Identifying the most common post treatment complications that reception team could handle to reassure the patient. Dry socket? Post sedation effects? After hygienist session discomfort, bleeding, gaps?**

- **Following patient up after their first consultation** - patient did not book in for treatment. Use this as an opportunity to find out why they have not booked. Would they benefit from another shorter consultation? perhaps with a nurse or TCO? Do they need clarification of any treatment or help with financials?
• Bringing someone’s appointment forward - fitting them into a last minute cancellation – this works great if you have a busy diary and patients have to wait for a while to be seen. They will appreciate this and your surgery will not waste any valuable time. Win-Win situation!

Collecting patient fees

• Asking for an upfront payment when booking patients in for treatment. Make it a standard practice and stick to it. This will gain your patient commitment. This is also your opportunity to train all the new patients. They don’t know any different!

• Collecting outstanding payments after treatment has completed - have a clear protocol and ensure this is done regularly on a weekly basis to avoid long periods of time between treatment completed and your phone call.

• Requesting to pay charges due to missed appointment - payment should be made prior to booking any future appointments

Dealing with difficult or aggressive patients:

• Informing patient that no further appointments can be booked due to too many no-shows

• Informing of the procedure to proof of exemption for NHS dental treatment.

Reinforcing practice policies and procedures

• Knowing how to respond when due to Confidentiality and Data Protection Act, patient data cannot be released. I find this often gets tricky when parents call on behalf of their grown up children or partners want to know about each other’s treatments and when appointments are booked.

• Handling complaints or responding to a negative/positive feedback. Negative feedback or complaints may not necessarily be a disaster. Although if not handled correctly and with delays, unfortunately it may become a disaster! Look at patient suggestions or complaints as a suggestion to improve your services. Always discuss these situations with your team in your team meetings and learn from the situation so it is prevented in the future.

You cannot prevent all patient problems or difficult situations from occurring. What you can do is to find the best way to handle such situations by using scripts and regular practice/ training meetings to develop patient communication systems.

Never lose your focus on providing the highest standards of care for your patients and keep on building a comfortable working environment for your team by infusing professional development opportunities.

Create the standard – expect the standard!

Be well and keep learning!