



### **Patients – practices lifeblood (Part 1 of 3)**

As dental practice management consultants, we talk with dentists not only in Colorado but nationwide. We're frequently hearing that many practices have seen dramatic decreases in patient flow – new and reappointed patients – since the middle of last year. The downturn has been accompanied by a decrease in acceptance of larger treatment plans.

Let's take a look at the data for an average healthy practice so that you can see where your practice ranks.

- New Patients: an established dentist should be getting a minimum of 20 new patients monthly to replace those that move away, pass away or go elsewhere.
- Reappointment: (an often overlooked statistic) you should be reappointing about 96 percent of your patients; meaning that 4 percent or less leave without an appointment.
- Case Acceptance: (the patient actually scheduled the appointment) expect about 40 percent case acceptance from new patients and 75 percent from existing patients.
- You should be scheduled at 90 percent of the following month's goal so that you only have to make up 10 percent of what's missing.
- When reactivating patients, your staff should be scheduling 20 percent of the patients they contact.

How do you know if you have enough patients? We believe a practice should have 1,200 or more “active” patients per dentist. Our philosophy is that an “active” patient is simply defined as one *with* an appointment. If they don't have an appointment, nothing good happens: they are either going to call you because something breaks *or* because their teeth are feeling furry after not having them cleaned for three years or else your scheduler is going to have to spend time making reactivation calls (the “R” word will usually put the fear of God into any staff member) because you have too many holes in your schedule.

Over the years, we have found the following to be true:

- The most profitable model in dentistry today is the 2/2/2 model: one Dentist (working out of two chairs) with two EDDAs, two full time hygienists (this only works if you have a solid perio program so that you don't have to do 16 exams every day), and two full time administrative staff.
- One hygienist can see approximately 600 patients a year. Here is how the math works: 8 patients per day times 4 days a week times 50 weeks a year = 1,600 visits. 1,600 divided by 3 (half your patients are periodontally healthy and come in twice a year and the remainder have periodontal disease and are coming in four times a year) = 533. Add in padding for kids and you get 600 patients per year.
- If the dentist has two full time hygienists then he or she can take care of approximately 1,200 patients.

Do you have approximately 1,200 “active” patients? If you don't, you may be suffering from the all-too-common lack of patient flow malaise. So, what can you do about it? First, we have to recognize that there are only three ways that patients flow into the practice. They are either brand new patients, they have an appointment, or they have to be reactivated. We usually see practices that are strong in two out of three of these areas but seldom in all three. This three-part article is going to deal with each of these three areas of patient flow.

