

Presentation of Ideal Treatment ...

Do patients need or just want what we are selling?

by Michael Perry, D.D.S.

Years ago, when I was active on my local dental society board, our members were very concerned about the managed care juggernaut that was moving up the freeway from the south -- threatening to engulf our local dental community. One of the resistance strategies I adopted was to do a literature review that would hopefully uncover some obscure bits of evidence-based dentistry that would connect managed care delivery systems to poor quality treatment outcomes.

To my dismay, I not only failed to find articles with the right philosophical bend, I found long term studies performed within the confines of Britain's socialized dental care system that concluded there was no correlation between a patient's life span and the age when his/her teeth were replaced with complete dentures. In short, people who lost their teeth at an early age lived just as long as those who went through life without ever losing theirs.

The scientific credibility of these studies aside, the revelation that dental treatment was rarely increasing patients' life span, but often increasing their quality of life was profound for me. This meant that dentists are providing services that, for the most part, are discretionary for patients and therefore must be sold rather than mandated as necessities for health.

Few business people outside of dentistry would disagree with the idea that dental case presentation is a form of sales and that successful sales requires an effective technique. I have developed a technique for my practice which incorporates thorough diagnostic protocol with effective sales strategies. The steps are:

- Patient interview
- Permission statement
- Comprehensive examination
- Ideal treatment presentation
- Fee quotation
- Negotiation
- Financial arrangement

Most dentists are analytical in nature and feel most comfortable presenting to patients by explaining proposed treatment in great detail. One of my early mentors once stated that "dentists often spend 3 minutes selling a case and the next 10 buying it back." We erroneously assume patients share our passion for details and end up creating uncertainty and confusion in the process. I found it much more effective to communicate to each patient what I think would be ideal for them based upon their goals -- without them feeling pressured to accept treatment. Most often, my technique is successful with patients deciding to accept some, if not all of the treatment I present. In addition, my thoroughness creates feelings of confidence and trust within the patient, my team, and myself that in turn increase my personal fulfillment, profitability, and practice growth. Isn't that what fee for service practice is all about?

