



Managing patient expectations in dentistry

There are several factors which influence a patient's satisfaction following treatment and whether they'll complain about the clinical outcome. One key factor is the expectations they have prior to being treated.

Patient expectations

Many patients will go into dental appointments with some level of expectation regarding the outcome. They may have a very clear and detailed outcome in mind, or it may be broader and more open. Most importantly, some of these expectations will be realistic, however others won't be.

Unrealistic patient expectations pose very real challenges for dentists. If a patient undergoes treatment which they have unrealistic expectations about, it's unlikely those expectations are going to be met simply due to them being unrealistic. If a patient's expectations haven't been met, it's likely the patient is going to be unhappy or dissatisfied with the treatment. Those unhappy and dissatisfied patients are the ones more likely to complain about the treatment and expect further treatment or compensation. It's therefore vital that dentists do all they can to help patients fully understand the treatment being provided and the

likely and realistic outcomes before treatment begins.

Creating realistic expectations

A key step in making sure a patient has realistic outcomes regarding treatment is to have an open and honest conversation with them. This will not only provide the patient with information about their treatment, it will also give the dentist a clearer understanding of the patient's expectations. A dentist's clinical skills are vital to what they do, however effective communication goes a long way in providing positive outcomes.



Don't go it alone

To assist a patient to have realistic expectations, dentists must ensure they explain the treatment and outcomes using simple, clear terms. Technical clinical language should be avoided as many patients won't understand this. Dentists should also be mindful of the patient hearing what they want to hear; patients don't want to believe their treatment might fail. Therefore, they may not fully take on board the risks or limitations of the treatment being explained to them.

Dentists should consider how they tailor their language and the information for each individual patient. For example, a person with language or literacy challenges may need information presented in a more detailed manner than other patients. Dentists should also consider using diagrams, pictures, or models to assist with understanding where appropriate.

When discussing treatment with a patient, it's important that dentists don't make assumptions about what the patient will understand. It's easy for dentists to become so familiar with what they do and know that they sometimes forget how foreign that knowledge can be to other people. Patients will have varying degrees of knowledge and experience regarding dental treatment. Therefore, what they understand about their treatment will also vary.

Treatment requests

A dentist should be especially mindful of a patient's expected outcome in situations where the patient has requested a particular type of treatment. When this occurs, the patient has likely formed a decision regarding what treatment they need



to get the outcome they desire. What they're requesting and expecting may be reasonable and realistic, however in some cases it may not be. When presented with this situation, dentists need to be sure they don't rush into providing the patient with the requested treatment. As with all patients, there needs to be a thorough assessment and diagnosis process. Then the patient is to be provided with their treatment options, as well as the risks and benefits of those options. There may be treatment options which are more suitable which the patient isn't aware of. The patient also needs to be made aware of the likely treatment outcomes for each of those treatment options.

The dentist needs to be sure the patient has all required information before consenting to treatment and

this includes understanding the likely outcomes. A patient's request for a particular treatment doesn't alter this required process. And dentists need to remember that they're always responsible for the treatment they've provided, regardless of whether it was requested by a patient.

In summary...

Dentists should be doing all they can to improve the outcomes for their patients and reduce the likelihood of poor outcomes and complaints. An important step in this process is making sure patients have realistic expectations regarding treatment outcomes. Dentists have a very important role to use their clinical knowledge alongside their communication skills to assist patients to develop realistic expectations.

1800 810 213
guildinsurance.com.au



Don't go it alone