

OFF THE CUSP

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8 EXPERT BUSINESS TIPS FOR REOPENING YOUR DENTAL OFFICE AMID A PANDEMIC

By Patterson Dental

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Whether you're handling emergencies only, entirely shut down, or taking initial steps to reopen, you're no doubt focused on the near-term future of your practice.

Understanding where your business stands and developing a plan is key to diving back into full-service patient care, no matter which phase you find yourself in. We've connected with a top Patterson Dental business educator to help you swiftly move from recovering to revitalized.

Advising through her laptop screen, Kathy Brodal exudes immeasurable passion and enthusiasm for her 32-year career associated with dentistry. Despite being temporarily sidelined from travel by the COVID-19 pandemic, the educator is still plowing ahead remotely, sharing her expertise for successfully jumpstarting the business side of your practice.

Here, she offers eight ways to plan, prepare and pull off a strategy for propelling your business forward effectively.

1. Communicate with patients while you're limited to emergency care only

Patient communication is always key to practice success. Yet it's especially vital when you can't see patients face to face in your office, says Brodal. "Call 10 of your patients per day and tell them you're excited to see them when this is over. Take the opportunity to reassure them that you are still there for them and will continue to be there as you reopen. Remind them that your office has always achieved the highest level of sterilization for their protection and for yours, and that you will continue to do so. This also affords you the chance to prepare them for any changes they may see when they visit the office and explain that those changes are all about protecting them, the patient."

Brodal also says it's an ideal time to connect with patients while they're staying inside. "We're all stuck at home and so are all the patients. We're used to leaving a lot of messages for patients and hoping they call us back. You should have someone at least part-time in the office, answering the phones and following up with unscheduled patients while they're easily reachable."

2. Use a team script

Brodal relates it's important and helpful to have your entire team working from the same script as they call overdue patients for services. "Ask your Patterson representative for [specialized](#)

[messaging](#), print it and have the team write it in their own words so they're all speaking the same language. Give them guidelines to call the patients that are overdue this month, two, six, or 12 months late in getting in to see you," says Brodal.

3. Schedule hygiene appointments first

Hygiene appointments may not be at the forefront of your mind; however, Brodal explains why she thinks ramping up hygiene appointments first where there are openings in your schedule is a wise idea. "I know there are others out there telling you that you should expand your hours and start working on weekends. I'm not willing to say that unless you absolutely have to, because then you have to start paying your teams and also then be careful about how you're communicating to your patients, so they don't think the practice is going to be open evenings and on Saturdays forever.

Hygiene is really what feeds the doctor's schedule." Insurance, she elaborates, pays for a majority, if not all, of those cleaning visits. "I have a feeling the longer this goes, the more people are going to be concerned about their finances, leaving a lot more openings on the restorative side. Patients are going to want to hold onto their money, and they're not going to want to pay their half of a crown prep or for their deductible plus their portion of billing," she offers.

Hygiene appointments also open the door to having discussions about future treatments or procedures and reassuring patients that you will continue the same quality care after the pandemic has subsided.

4. Sterilize, sterilize, sterilize

Brodal advises taking advantage of an office closure to sterilize the practice from top to bottom. "Walk the practice through the eyes of the patient and ask yourself what you see. I recommend teams do this on normal days, too, but it's even more important now. Is there dust in the vents? Is there any splash on your mirrors or lights? Really make sure everything is spotless and sterilized."

While you're at it, she suggests utilizing Patterson equipment technicians to inspect and ensure your equipment was turned off properly or turn on your systems, so when you return to practice, you'll have already addressed any mechanical or technological issues.

5. Ensure your accounts receivable is in order

Another unique opportunity this time allows is the ability to look closely at your accounts receivable, says Brodal. "Review all money owed to practice – make sure claims have been sent, you're following up on outstanding insurance claims and that your billing statements are going out. You'll want to do this now because you'll need to have the money come in and not wait until you reopen to follow up on overdue bills."

6. Clean up treatment plans

Consider tidying up your treatment plans, proposes Brodal. "In my 32 years in dentistry, I've seen maybe five to 10 offices that complete their treatment planning correctly. In an ideal world, they would put the treatment plan in the computer, schedule out of it and then post the treatment from the schedule."

Brodal provides an all-too-common scenario: "What happens is, you may recommend a crown but the secondary treatment would be a filling. If the dentist completes the crown, they should delete the filling from the plan. If they choose the filling, they should reject the crown, which will still be on the treatment plan, but not as a follow-up item. This will avoid calling the patient to schedule a procedure (the filling), when they've already had the treatment completed (the crown). I'd have the dental assistants go back a month and clean up those plans and keep them

clean for the future. Then you can comfortably call those patients and avoid feeling uncomfortable if they've already had the treatment.”

7. Lean on the Patterson Technology Center support network

“Eight out of 10 practice analyses I run show the office needs to participate in some software training.” Brodal says that can be anything from running production reports to finding important business nuggets to increase return on investment. “Often in dental offices, the turnover is so large, the employees are only trained on what the last employee knew. So, they're missing out on a lot of opportunity in terms of what Eaglesoft and other software can do for them. I recommend they [train on those systems](#) with the Patterson Technology Center (PTC).”

Perhaps one of the most valuable insights Brodal provides is to let the PTC do the heavy digital lifting for you. “Call and ask the PTC to inactivate the patients who haven't been active in your system within the past three years and don't have an account balance, so you and your team don't have to do that manually. It's a huge timesaver. I can't tell you how many practices I see that have 15,000 to 20,000 patients and we narrow it down and they really have 1,200 to 2,000 patients they see. It's difficult to make practice decisions, like adding assistants, hygienists and chairs if you don't know what your patient base truly is. If you can only run one report during this time, run that one.”

8. Use your time wisely

While you're treating emergencies only, Brodal encourages using this time to look at your revenue streams and see how you can invest to grow your practice and make it run more efficiently. “It's extremely important to know what your numbers are and where your practice is right now. Work with your territory rep because they have the knowledge and solutions to help you get up and running again. They can help you see how the right equipment and technology upgrades can bring big returns for you.”

'Open and thriving'

Brodal herself hopes she can travel to practices again soon, because she knows just how gratifying those returns can be. “I'll never forget this one office I helped. A widowed dentist who had thought about closing her practice came running out to me, gave me a big hug and said, ‘My new office is now open and thriving because of you. You showed me what I would be missing, what my patients would be missing.’ And (beyond that), her business growth was just fantastic.”

Patterson offers a wealth of information as you look to reopen, including checklists, thought leadership articles, practice analysis tools, patient communication guides and more. Visit <https://www.pattersondental.com/cp/covid-19>.

About the Expert

Kathy Brodal has been in the dental industry for more than 32 years and her experience spans all areas of the industry — from certified dental assistant to office manager, practice consultant and director of continuing education workshops. In her current role with Patterson Dental, Kathy is responsible for maintaining relationships with Patterson managers and territory reps, and for supporting them in their clients' practice success.

From Patterson Dental's blog, Off the Cusp. View the original blog post: <https://www.offthecusp.com/how-to-automate-patient-engagement/>