

OFF THE CUSP

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information from Patterson Dental.

THE ROAD TO REOPENING: ONE PRACTICE'S PATH TO SAFELY GETTING BACK TO BUSINESS

By Patterson Dental

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When [Melissa Brown, DDS](#), founded Murray Hill Family Dental, she worked hard to prepare for many different business situations. But needing to close and reopen her practices due to a global pandemic isn't one she could have imagined.

Dr. Brown, along with her husband, [Troy Walton](#), director of business operations, own Murray Hill Family Dental in West Columbus and Westerville, Ohio. Both locations offer state-of-the-art preventive, restorative and cosmetic dental care. They have built a loyal customer following and are an active and important part of their community.

Connected while apart

As COVID-19 became more widespread across the U.S. and states began to shut down, Dr. Brown and Walton started preparing what they needed to do to protect their patients, staff and business.

"I was doing a lot of research on Facebook groups and watching what other dentists and state plans were doing to anticipate what we should do when it came time to close," said Dr. Brown. When that time came, they communicated with their teams about what to expect and then began reaching out to patients.

During the closure, they made it a point to keep connected with patients through social media. "We featured what staff members were doing during quarantine, such as homeschooling and spending time with family," said Walton.

To stay connected to their staff, they sent relevant news, tips, webinars and even funny memes to keep spirits up. "To keep our close-knit culture alive, we delivered pizza to our staff at their homes and held a virtual pizza party over Zoom," said Walton. And, they stayed connected to their community by providing donations to a local hospital system.

Plan, train and communicate

As they started to get closer to reopening, Dr. Brown and Walton worked closely with their Patterson territory representative Matt Daniel. "Our Patterson representative was instrumental in helping us know much PPE and supplies we needed to order," said Dr. Brown. "We talked to him

all the time during the closure and he gave us incredibly helpful ideas and solutions based on his expertise and what he was seeing in field,” she said.

After creating the reopen plan they:

- Held one-on-one Zoom meetings with staff to share a financial update and address concerns about coming back into the practice
- Asked their leadership group to create visual guidelines for staff and patients
- Worked with their human resources director to review the CARES Act and communicate reopening plans and new procedures with staff
- Trained staff via Zoom and then in-office on new procedures

“We also did a mock practice patient run-through with our HR director to make sure we were HIPAA and OSHA compliant,” Walton said.

Next, they shifted their focus on communicating with patients. The team posted a [video](#) on social media to reassure patients about safety and share changes so they wouldn’t be surprised when they returned. “Our patients were so happy to have the video to help them know what to expect,” said Dr. Brown. “We like to be personable, and to have us all covered up in gear and barriers, we wanted them to know it’s still us underneath there,” she said.

Using RevenueWell, the team sent the video to all patients along with a personal message. They also used email and social media to share additional videos highlighting staff and welcoming back patients.

Goodbye free coffee, hello hand sanitizer

Patients are returning to a practice experience that looks and feels different than their last visit. Signs outside the practice direct patients to wait in their vehicles and call or text to be told when to come inside. “This has taken some work to coordinate, but we use hand-held radios to communicate throughout the practice,” said Dr. Brown.

Patients now go directly to the exam room instead of the waiting room, have their temperature taken and fill out a health questionnaire. Next, patients go to a hand sanitation station to clean their phone, place it into a purse or pocket and sanitize their hands. “We used to offer patients a paraffin wax hand dip that we obviously don’t anymore,” said Dr. Brown. Patients are also required to do a hydrogen peroxide mouth rinse prior to the start of any procedure.

Other changes include limiting one patient per doctor at a time. They are also using CAD/CAM technology to reduce the number of appointments per patient. “Once patients are here, they don’t want to come back right away for a crown,” said Dr. Brown.

Overall, patients have been very supportive and understanding of the new way of dentistry, said Dr. Brown. “Patients haven’t complained about any changes and keep telling us how happy and thankful they are that we are here and open again,” she said.

And the schedule is full. “Patients who are uneasy are deciding to wait, but those who were waiting for us to reopen are coming back,” said Dr. Brown.

They are also back to being a part of their community. They secured a billboard thanking front-line workers and recently hosted a virtual Souper Heroes Virtual 5K that raised money for COVID-19 hunger relief efforts – helping those most in need of food during the pandemic.

Transition to a new normal

While some things will eventually return to how it was pre-COVID-19, Dr. Brown thinks other things are here to stay such as PPE and greater acceptance of technology in the dental community.

Dr. Brown said her team is using technology more than ever before and expects it will be more prevalent going forward, especially as more and more patients become more comfortable with virtual visits.

“We have been using RevenueWell a lot for communication, such as texting patients, and for teledentistry. We really appreciate that Patterson has seamless technology that works together and makes everything easy,” Dr. Brown said.

Forward, together

Dr. Brown and Walton are grateful for how their teams supported each other during this time and are looking forward to working together to safely keep each other and patients healthy. “We never imagined we would need to be in this situation, but we are so proud of how everyone, including our Patterson team, worked together to help us move forward as smoothly as possible,” said Dr. Brown.

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From Patterson Dental’s blog, Off the Cusp. View the original blog post:

<https://www.offthecusp.com/the-road-to-reopening-one-dental-practices-path-to-safely-getting-back-to-business/>