

3 STEPS TO CREATE A POSITIVE PATIENT EXPERIENCE IN THE “NEW NORMAL”

By Patterson Dental

July 1, 2020

The more information you can share before an appointment, the more prepared and comfortable patients will be once in your office. For some patients, even setting up an appointment at a dental office is a huge step, so keeping them updated with paperwork, reminders for their appointments and a list of what to expect when they get to the office will help ensure they keep their appointment.

Dental anxiety has always been an issue, but during a pandemic, patients could be even more hesitant toward coming in for routine care. Here are three simple steps to create a positive patient experience and help make sure your schedule stays full and breaking appointments is a rarity.

1. Make dental appointments easy to schedule

The easier you can make it for your patients to schedule an appointment, the better chance you have of them making the time to come in. This could be an easy solution—from online scheduling through your practice management software, to creating a script for your front desk team members to use while scheduling over the phone. A script will help your front desk team keep the conversations welcoming but also straight to the point.

Along with offering online appointment scheduling or establishing a scheduling script for staff to follow, offering patients the ability to fill out paperwork online and ahead of their appointment keeps things easy and efficient. The ability to send paperwork to new patients—or updated paperwork to existing patients—via email will not only help your front desk team cut down on time spent scheduling over the phone but will also help your patients come prepared to their appointment.

2. Communicate changes to the check-in process

Life is different now and showing up to a dental appointment is no longer as easy as walking right into the office. This is where communication really plays a role in preparing your patients for their appointment. Although every office varies in this process, most are following similar cues with their infection control office experience. Here are some considerations when sending an email or text message to patients before their appointment:

- Ask patients to stay in their car and either text or call the office number before entering the building.
- Let patients know that when given the OK to come in for their appointment a face mask is required (if they do not have a mask the office will provide one).
- Discuss who is and is not allowed at the appointment (only one parent, just the patient).
- Consider using practice management software to send patients a COVID-19 screening questionnaire to fill prior to their appointment.
- Let patients know that their temperature will be taken before entering the clinic—include guidelines that will be followed if the patient is above a certain temperature.

3. Explain office or procedural changes during the appointment

Changes to the process of scheduling an appointment or the check-in process are not the only areas of the patient experience that might be different during this “new normal.” Patients will likely notice the extra personal protective equipment (PPE) worn by staff, Plexiglas at the reception desk or new equipment in the operatory. Here are a few topics to discuss during the appointment:

- [Reducing aerosols](#) is key right now and informing your patients of the changes your office has made will help them feel at ease. You can explain some of these changes while walking them back to their treatment room; this may help curb any anxiety the patient could be experiencing.
- New products and equipment will be seen around the office. Explaining these products or equipment will help patients understand the process of their appointment. For example, some dental offices are investing in high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration systems or extraoral suction.
- The more information you give patients during the appointment, the better the experience will be for both you and the patient. Explain pre-procedural protocols to patients once they are in the treatment room.
- It may be beneficial to explain the additional PPE clinicians are wearing and the purpose of each. Mention that all staff have their temperature taken prior to starting their shift so they know the clinician(s) and office staff assisting them are healthy.

Creating a positive patient experience has always been at the top of dentists’ minds, but office procedural changes due to COVID-19 have made it even more important. Implementing new communication protocols and making sure your office is helping each patient feel at ease with these changes and new experiences is crucial to helping patients feel at ease while also helping to keep your schedules full.

For the latest news and advice on practicing dental care in the age of COVID-19, visit our [Coronavirus Resource Center](#). And be sure to download our [Reopen. Restore. Playbook](#), a free comprehensive guide with everything you need to know to enable your office to meet demand and give patients the reassurance they need.

- - -

From Patterson Dental’s blog, Off the Cusp. View and share the original blog post: <https://www.offthecusp.com/3-steps-to-create-a-positive-patient-experience-in-the-new-normal/>