

Sandy Roth's

# Communique!

#14: *The True Cost of Confirmation Calls*

*Unique and Challenging Concepts from ProSynergy Dental Communications*

In preparation for our systems workshop, I've been thinking about some of the systems many dental practices create and considering the high cost of these mostly remedial efforts. The main idea we will be addressing is that many (most?) of the systems we create in our practices are designed to fix problems we created ourselves. If this hypothesis is true for you, you are likely paying huge costs to address situations which might have been avoided in the first place.

The confirmation call is a classic example of this syndrome. When we institutionalize the confirmation call, we create a very expensive remedial system. In many cases, the confirmation call is like the sign on a blue highway:

I wonder how many patients think about an appointment as "tentative" or "pencilled in" until it is "confirmed" by a phone call a day or two in advance? I wonder whether, upon

receiving such a call, a patient might quickly assess her schedule and checkbook to determine whether she still finds it convenient and affordable to come for her appointment? I wonder whether patients think you aren't particularly committed to an appointment until you confirm it with them?

So why do you make confirmation calls? My clients tell me it is primarily to insure that patients remember to come for their appointments because open time on the schedule is costly and frustrating. If that's the case, it seems like the best place to address this issue is at the time the appointment is made and insure you do everything to identify your expectations and ask your patients to honor their agreements with you.

When you make an appointment with (not for) a patient, you have negotiated a contract which must include agreement on the follow-

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ing issues:

- 1.The procedure to be performed
- 2.An understanding of why the procedure was recommended and why the patient has asked you to perform it
- 3.The fee for the procedure and how you and the patient have agreed the fee will be paid
- 4.The date and time as well as approximate duration of each of the appointments in the sequence
- 5.That these arrangements are confirmed at the time they are made – you agree to be on time and fully prepared to deliver on your promise and simultaneously the patient agrees to show up on time and fully prepared to deliver on his promise.

When the appointment-making process has been done well, confirmations become unnecessary and far fewer appointments will be changed or canceled for reasons that are diagnostic of incomplete clarity of the expectations you have from one another.

So, what is the true cost of confirmations? Certainly more than the high cost of administrative time and energy to make phone calls

and handle changes. The cost is in underdeveloped and unclear relationships. These relationships tend to be as unclear about where they are going (Outcome) as how you will get there (Means) and the costs you both will pay (Prices).

If you are confirming appointments, are you willing to keep paying this price? What can you do to change this? What would happen if, upon completing an agreement with your patient, you said something similar to:

“Mrs. Jones, I’m delighted to confirm your appointment as we are making it now. You needn’t worry that we will fail to be here because we are completely committed to this time for you. Since we’ve agreed on all of these matters now, I won’t bother you with a call the evening before unless you have some concern about your ability to remember it.”

Certainly there may be the odd person who will ask for the courtesy of a reminder call, and I see no problem with providing that service. You must be clear, however, that this call does not represent the last chance to get off the highway before the toll booth. When

you begin to take your appointments more seriously, your patients will as well. The words you use to represent the ideas in your own heads will set a standard for your patients which is more likely to result in healthy relationships than broken ones.

We can help guide you to eliminating this costly process in your practice and move toward a more predictable and reliable way of insuring that your patients show up.

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