

Time To Clean Up Your Act

This month Geoff Long FCA, leading Dental Accountant gives radical advice to Dentists on improving their professional image.

During 20 years in Dental Accountancy, I have visited a fair proportion of the Country's Dental Practices. Regrettably, the image of many practices I have visited leaves a lot to be desired:-

- i) Many of the practices smell.
- ii) Surgeries are often a mess. Paperwork is everywhere with clutter strewn over worktops.
- iii) Toothbrush sales in reception often resemble a table at the local church bazaar.

So what am I saying? With the introduction of the new NHS contract, Dentists are moving en-block towards the independent sector and need to radically improve their professional image if they to be successful in the Private Dentistry Market.

Communication style through Professional appearance can be a bridge or a barrier to Patients "if they don't like the messenger, they won't get the message". Dentists need people skills just as much as technical skills. Patients take your technical skills for granted; what they are buying is YOU!

At a recent lecture I gave, I asked the Dentists to define 'Professional'. This is the list of qualities they came up with:-

- Does not criticise other Dentist's work.
- Does not criticise staff in public
- Well informed
- Respects confidentiality
- Discreet
- Does not allow personal feelings to intrude
- Polite
- Runs on time
- Has a clear Dental ethos
- Appropriate appearance
- Does not take advantage of patients insecurities
- Has a positive approach in the surgery, not using sarcasm
- Respects patients reluctance to fully take up treatment plans.
- Always prepared for appointments

Professional Image

As a Dentist your professional image is a picture advertising what you have on offer. It is your promise of a delivery. A Dentist's professional impact is based on five items.

1. Consistency

Your professional demeanour cannot be put on and off like a coat. An image has to be consistent to be effective.

2. Credibility

This is based on:-

- Looking as though you can do Dentistry.
- Sounding as though you can do the job by using the appropriate language. Do you inform rather than baffle and bewilder?
- Knowing Dental culture. This means knowing the rules of Dentistry, when to abide by them and when to break them.

3. Competence

This is the range of talents and skills that defines what you can do as a Dentist. Professionally speaking you should excel at wet fingered Dentistry. If not, take up law.

4. Control

Self-control shows maturity.
Bad manners and temper
equate to a lack of control.
Letting off steam in the surgery
could jeopardise the impression
you are trying to create.

5. Confidence

Confidence is that indefinable
something within the Dentist.
Physiological signs of
confidence are breathing easily
and sitting up straight.
Psychological signs of
confidence come from knowing
your Dentistry and good
preparation.



Image Breakers

Here are some detractors from your image as a Dentist that you might recognise.

1. Consistency Breakers

"I can't be bother today, cancel the patients nurse, no one will notice. I'm having an off day". Rule number one in Dentistry is you never cancel the Patients.

2. Credibility Breakers

Not having time to read the FP25 first. Flannelling in reply to tricky questions. "I'm sorry...." Saying sorry sends out messages of low esteem.

3. Competence Breaker

Getting it wrong when it really matters.

4. Control Breakers

Being disorganised, late, bad mannered or bad tempered shows the Patient you are out of control.

5. Confidence Breakers

Hesitancy in speech is an example.

Image Howlers

There is no accounting for taste but consider these Dental Image Breakers:-

- Sport shoes with a suit
- Unrelieved black
- Dandruff on collar
- T-shirts with slogans
- Visible pant line
- Laddered or snagged tights
- No bra
- Overpowering fragrance
- Shoe heels in need of repair
- Poor complexion
- Bad breath
- Running shoes
- Transparent fabrics
- Unpolished shoes
- Vulgar tie
- Careless shave
- In need of a haircut
- Fisherman sweaters
- White blouse over black bra
- Rows of pens or pencils in top pocket
- String vest under nylon shirt
- Leather or suede trousers
- Flower frocks
- Evening fabrics worn during the day
- Trousers heavily creased at the crutch
- No tights
- Strange body odour
- Chipped nail varnish

You don't want to look like a loser.

Levels Of Dress

Level of dress deals with how formal or informal you wish to appear in the surgery. Choosing a wardrobe from the right level of formality is an important first step. Women usually have more choices of level of dress than men, but men seem to still have many opportunities for getting it wrong!

In deciding the level of dress, the Dentist will need to consider the type of Practice and Patient base they are practicing at. Dress in a city of London practice will differ markedly from a family practice in the Shire counties.

Generally speaking the Dentist should dress one level of formality high than his patients who visit him. It should be noted that anything worn for boating, riding, aerobics or tennis is not suitable attire for the surgery.

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