



Shared values and philosophy

By Kathleen McKellar

This last week, I was working in a practice with two principal dentists, two hygienists and a support staff of six. When interviewing the practice members, the hygienists were struggling with two different treatment philosophies with the dentists. One dentist is perceived as very conservative and puts a “watch” on things. The other dentist is very proactive and loves to “sell” dentistry.

The dentists were struggling with two perceived different treatment skills with the hygienists. One hygienist was very slow, thorough and methodical and gave long explanations to patients and ran behind schedule. The other was quick, lively, may not have had the best skills, made recommendations and stayed to schedule.

While interviewing the support members, the same common practice management problems were mentioned. Late cancellations; no shows; patients arriving late; hygienist running behind schedule; patients getting to the front desk and not knowing what they are paying for; patients asking questions at the front desk; inconsistent communication between front and back - and between treatment rooms; same clinical hygiene diagnosis with very different treatment plans; one hygienist dominating the hygiene assistant; hygienists not making a recommendation or hygienists making a recommendation and the dentist not following through; the dentist keeping the hygienist waiting for an examination; the dentist asking the hygienist to perform additional services while the patient is in the chair; one hygienist advises certain medicaments/treatments and the other hygienist not believing the same; stressful environment. Phew!

The solution was very simple. Before we can work on the practice management issues, it is important in group practices for the providers to have the same shared values and philosophy. These values and philosophy should be shared by all practice

members and be a banner for the practice.

In fact, many times the practice members perceive the providers to have very different philosophies when in fact there are only subtle differences that can be easily reconciled.

As with the above, the provider’s had similar values and philosophy, the upset came in the execution, confidence of being understood and supported and systems and procedures. Without continuity between all providers and practice members and a clear understanding of the practice values and philosophy, it is nearly impossible to improve systems and procedures and the working environment. In the hygiene department, it is nearly impossible to reach goals.

If your practice has more than one hygienist, it is particularly important to spend time getting everyone in continuity with shared values and philosophy. There are four areas that need to be consistent between your hygiene department and the practice members in order to improve your working environment.

Having a dynamic hygiene department working at a very high level can create massive growth in the practice. In a safe, honest and open environment, discuss the provider’s values and philosophies. From this platform create:

1. Standard of care

For all of the services you provide to the patients, having a stand of care will clarify what treatments are necessary and why. This is a most important ever-evolving tool to creating shared values and philosophies. If you would like a copy of the DDS Standard of Care for Hygiene, I am happy to provide it.

2. Treatment planning

Each week, set an hour aside to review all the hygiene treatment plans that are to be presented and have been presented that

week. As there may be exceptions to the Standard of Care, explain your reasoning.

3. Education

During the week, ask other practice members what they think of the treatment plans and what their recommendations would be for treatment. Constantly educate patients and other practice members on your latest philosophy and changes to Standard of Care.

4. Execution

Live your values and philosophy. Put the practice management systems and procedures into places that provide for your values and philosophies. Ask for the support of all practice members to keep you accountable to your philosophy. It is so easy to become busy and overwhelmed and fall back into comfortable habits.

As a hygienist, your impact on patients and the entire dental practice will often be the most rewarding part of your career. Hygienists play a huge role in patients’ confidence in the dentist’s skills and treatment recommendations. This is why if the providers do not have common values and philosophy, there will be difficulty in patients accepting treatment, retaining patients in the practice and having a cooperative working environment.

About the author

Kathleen McKellar has been working in dental practice development since 1979, providing extensive training and organisation to dental practices. Her philosophy is to work with the Dentist and their staff while providing the knowledge and tools to give total patient care and to increase profits. She has a strong commitment to patient treatment, staff development and education, has worked in the United States and is now permanently based in Australia. She can be contacted on (02) 9387-7211 or email: dentdevserv@aol.com