



From Consultation to Connection

**Mastering the Art of Patient
Communication in Dentistry**

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The Art of Patient Communication

Communication is a fundamental element in every aspect of our lives, and its significance in healthcare cannot be overstated. In dental practices, effective communication between dentists and patients forms the backbone of high-quality care. Everyone has a preferred way of communicating, which extends to how they interact with their dental providers.

As the dental industry becomes more competitive, meeting patients' expectations in their preferred communication methods can make the difference in attracting new patients and retaining existing ones.



The Impact of Poor Communication

Poor communication can significantly affect the patient experience. A 2021 survey found that 27.7% of adults switched dentists due to poor communication experiences.¹ This statistic highlights the critical role of effective communication in patient retention. Patients today expect a personalized and seamless communication experience that mirrors their interactions in other areas of their lives.

Additionally, poor communication can lead to misunderstandings about diagnoses, treatment options, and procedures, increasing anxiety and reducing adherence to treatment plans.

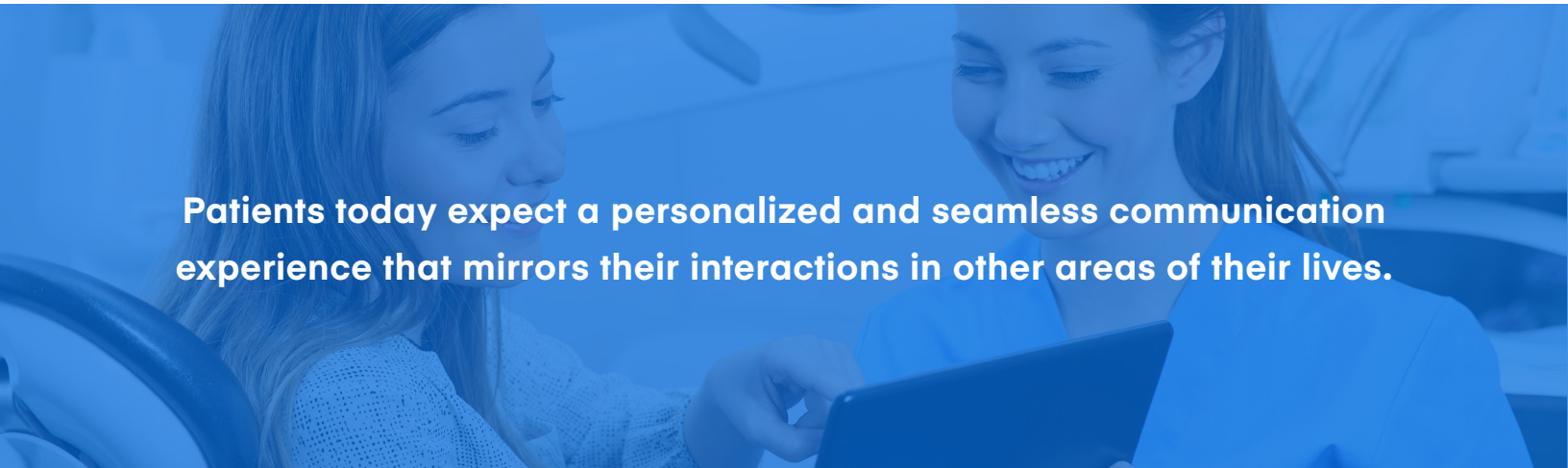


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The Need for Customized Communication

Focusing solely on the volume or channel of communication is not enough. Patients expect a customized experience where communication feels like a continuation of a dialogue. Just as a face-to-face conversation would be awkward if the parties were not on the same page, an email or text message can feel out of place if it is not relevant to the patient.

Clear communication ensures that patients understand their diagnoses, treatment options, and the procedures being performed. This clarity reduces anxiety, increases patient satisfaction, and improves adherence to treatment plans.



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Benefits of Effective Patient Communication

Engaging with patients offers numerous benefits:

- ✓ **ENHANCED PATIENT EXPERIENCE**
When dental practices communicate through patients' preferred channels, it enhances the overall patient experience. Personalized communication makes patients feel valued and understood.
- ✓ **INCREASED PATIENT ENGAGEMENT**
Contacting patients through their preferred methods leads to higher engagement. A study showed that text messages have a 98% open rate, compared to a 20% open rate for emails.²
- ✓ **IMPROVED TREATMENT ACCEPTANCE**
Clear communication can improve patients' understanding of their oral health conditions and the importance of recommended treatments. This understanding can lead to higher treatment acceptance and better health outcomes.
- ✓ **EMPOWERMENT**
By building rapport with a conversational approach, dentists can empower patients with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about their oral health. Increasing understanding through education gives patients confidence to accept the treatment that they need.
- ✓ **PATIENT SATISFACTION**
Communicating with empathy addresses patients' needs and preferences, increases adherence to treatment recommendations, and boosts overall patient satisfaction.



Increasing patient engagement: Text messages have a **98% open rate** compared to a 20% open rate for emails.

Best Practices for Communicating with Patients

To enhance communication with patients, practices should implement the following five best practices:³

- 1 PRECONDITIONING PATIENTS**

Preconditioning refers to the initial interactions and impressions patients have before their first appointment. This can include referrals, marketing strategies, website interactions, and phone conversations with staff. Proper preconditioning can lead to higher case acceptance and shorter consultation times.
- 2 USING MULTIPLE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS**

While text messaging is highly effective for urgent communications like appointment reminders, other channels should not be ignored. Emails can be used for non-urgent messages, providing patients with detailed information they can review at their convenience. Phone calls can be reserved for more personal interactions.
- 3 FOCUSING ON BENEFITS**

When discussing treatment plans, it's crucial to focus on the benefits rather than delve into technical dental terminology. Patients are more likely to agree to treatment when they understand how it will directly benefit them, such as eliminating pain or improving their ability to chew comfortably.
- 4 SIMPLIFYING THE PATH TO ACCEPTANCE**

After presenting a treatment plan, make it easy for patients to accept and schedule their treatment. This includes providing clear information about financial options and being flexible with scheduling.
- 5 PATIENT-CENTERED APPROACH**

Having a patient-centered approach is essential for effective communication. This involves understanding the patient's perspective, engaging in shared decision-making, and providing information at the patient's own pace. Dentists should use simple, clear language, appropriate body language, and visual aids to enhance understanding. Empathy and patience are crucial, as is creating an environment where patients feel comfortable asking questions and providing input.



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What Message Are You Sending to Your Patients?

To build trust and clarity, practices should emphasize both verbal and non-verbal communication with patients:

VERBAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

This includes both oral and written forms. Oral communication allows for immediate feedback and clarification, making it ideal for consultations. However, it can be challenging when conveying lengthy or complex information or when language barriers exist. Written communication, such as consent forms and educational materials, provides a permanent record that patients can refer to later. These documents should be written in plain language that is easily understood by patients.



NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

This includes facial expressions, body posture, gestures, and eye contact. These cues are powerful tools for expressing empathy, building trust, and providing reassurance. Dentists should be mindful of their non-verbal behaviors and ensure they align with their verbal messages. Positive body language, such as smiling, maintaining eye contact, and leaning forward, can enhance the patient's comfort and confidence.



Listening and Feedback

Active listening is a critical skill for dentists.

This involves giving full attention to the patient, understanding their concerns, and responding appropriately. Encouraging patients to ask questions and provide feedback can improve their understanding and satisfaction. Dentists should make it a routine practice to seek feedback, as it provides valuable insights into areas for improvement.

What Do Your Patients Think?

Patient satisfaction is a key indicator of the quality of dental care. Satisfied patients are more likely to return for future care, adhere to treatment plans, and refer others to the practice. Dentists can use satisfaction surveys to identify areas for improvement and enhance their services. These surveys can provide insights into various aspects of the patient experience, from the comfort of the waiting area to the professionalism of the staff.⁴



Take a Self-Assessment of Your Communication Skills

The Nova Scotia Dental Association recommends these self-assessment questions to help improve communication with your patients.⁵

Question	Always	Some	Rarely	Never
1. Do you take the time to explain the agenda for each patient's visit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Do you feel rushed during each appointment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. During the dental exam, do you explain what you are seeing and looking for?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. When an exam is over, do you ask the patient if they have any questions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Do you discuss the pros and cons of treatment options?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Have you expressed, as the expert, your preferred option of treatment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Do you supply patients with information they can take home with them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Do you take the time to discuss fees for treatment directly with your patient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Do you inform the patient of payment options?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Take the First Step for Better Patient Communication

Discover how personalized, multi-channel communication can enhance patient satisfaction, increase engagement, and improve treatment adherence. Start transforming your patient interactions today with Denticon Patient Communication.

Contact us now to learn more about Denticon Patient Communication and how it can help you build stronger connections with patients.

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