

Steps to Successful Patient Care: The 4 Cs

by Debbie Seidel-Bittke

Dental health professionals see a wide range of oral disease and injuries and become familiar with ever-expanding treatment options. Dental hygienists are the front line in fighting oral disease and are often the first to identify gingivitis and periodontitis.

A healthy mouth is part of a healthy body, but it's not always easy to convince patients that the minimum their insurance covers is not necessarily the best option for continued, total health.



Our Role is to Help Patients Live a Longer and Healthier Life

The mission is to create a healthier life for your patient, not to focus on what the patient's insurance will pay. This means conducting not only a medical history review and oral cancer screening; but for patients who have not been seen for a hygiene appointment in over one year, a comprehensive periodontal evaluation. After complete assessments and a determination as to whether the patient is healthy or exhibits signs of disease, it's important to sit with the patient and look at the results together. It's important to make smart decisions about oral health care.

How these decisions are made is critical. The 4 Cs of patient care are a way to focus time during the hygiene visit and guide a patient through a discussion of oral health and its relationship to a longer and healthier life.

Connect

Connect with your patient beyond the mouth when you first begin the appointment. The patient's body is not simply the vehicle that brings the mouth to you. What can you learn about your patient beyond what is needed in this dental appointment? Health history questions provide a good beginning to understanding the whole person.

Communicate

Communicate what you see with factual, easy-to-follow descriptions. Then discuss your observations. Once your patient understands what is happening in their mouth and how this affects total health, they are more likely to follow treatment recommendations.

Care

Show you honestly care for your patient's total health. You have the opportunity to fully explain how the benefits to total health begin in the mouth. You can provide home care items that are easy, and essential, to integrate into daily life. Once you have connected, you are more likely to have a positive conversation with the person in your chair.

Commit

Whether your patient will schedule treatment and the necessary follow-up care will be based on many things, including the patient's understanding of the problem, the benefits on the patient's plan, and your office's schedule, just to name a few. Provide the information to help the patient commit to the plan before you begin the conversation of scheduling further treatment. If your patient is overdue for a prophylaxis appointment, or overdue for a periodontal maintenance appointment, or when your assessment shows signs of disease, take the opportunity to discuss the inflammatory process and how treatment can slow this process.

When you take time to personally know and understand the person in your chair, you connect as individuals. You can demonstrate you truly care about overall health. Learn what is valuable to the patient so you can speak to their values as you discuss oral health. Communicate the best service(s) necessary for their oral condition in a way that's easily understood. What simple steps can be taken at home to help oral health? What treatments, often complex, are needed in the dental office to provide oral health that involves maintenance instead of constant treatment?

Once you **CONNECT** and begin to know the person in your chair, you can learn the best way to **COMMUNICATE**. Now you have someone in your chair who is more likely to **COMMIT** to the best care needed. With these steps completed, you have built great rapport, meaning your patient probably has a high level of trust in you as a healthcare provider. This means your patient is more likely to accept your **CARE** and return for future visits. This is how we can help create a longer and healthier life for all our patients.



Debbie Seidel-Bittke, RDH, BS

is a dental consultant, coach, speaker, and author. She is also CEO of Dental Practice Solutions.

FMI: 888.816.1511 or

www.dentalpracticesolutions.com

Quote-Worthy

“ A friend is a gift you give yourself. ”

— Robert Louis Stevenson