



CPR to Revive a Dying Dental Practice

PART ONE: Connect, Promote, Remember

by Belle DuCharme

This article is the first of a two-part series on bringing new life to a faltering dental practice. The following case study is based upon facts. The names and some information have been changed to conceal the identity of the doctor and the practice.

Recently I went to the dental office of a new client who had purchased the existing practice six years ago. Dr. Abbe was concerned because his new patient numbers had fallen off, and there were unfilled hygiene openings.

Practice management experts often agree that a solo general practice must have at least 300 new patients (comprehensive evaluations) yearly. In addition to this benchmark, there are so many other factors involved in making a practice productive and profitable, such as investing time and energy into giving patients an incentive to return.

As I walked through the front door of Dr. Abbe's office, the first thing I noticed was a floor-to-ceiling wall of yellowed, tattered paper charts behind the reception counter. The reception room décor looked like random items picked from the clearance rack at a discount department store, and the patient chairs were stackable aluminum frame, hard, cold, and frightfully uncomfortable. The usual outdated magazines touting health and travel stuffed into

a plastic wall display looked well-used, as if there was a standard long wait to see the dentist.

Dr. Abbe assured me his was a chartless practice; the wall was used as storage for old records. Yet, the perception was the practice was not modern and wasn't as HIPAA compliant as it should be in protecting patient records. Dr. Abbe explained that because the practice was about 90% PPO, he didn't see the need to improve the reception area. "PPO patients come here because we accept their plan and not because they expect anything fancy." He had no marketing plan in place to attract patients without insurance, and he'd done nothing to create a sense of welcome or comfort to his practice.

Meeting with the dental team, we discussed creating a culture of caring that included a pleasant experience for all five senses. If a patient has a dental PPO insurance plan, they are expecting the best dental service just as if they were paying in cash. It was time for **CPR**.

CONNECT VISUALLY, CREATE A CULTURE OF CARE.

People don't return to healthcare facilities for the same reasons they don't return to restaurants. They assess the physical appeal of the entrance, the reception area, the restroom facilities, the décor, the smell, the music, the cleanliness, the evidence of quality before they ever sample the product or service. All these are components of marketing and don't cost much to improve. Patients may not comprehend the value of the treatment they receive, but they always remember how the experience made them feel. A patient will come because you are on the PPO network but may not return because of an unfortunate encounter with the practice environment and culture.

The wall of the old charts went into boxes and were stored elsewhere. The team shopped for new waiting room chair designs and pleasing artwork for the reception wall.

Dr. Abbe wasn't sure of how to define their "culture." Culture is your leadership style, core values for care that make patients choose your office as their dental home. It is the uniqueness you offer that sets you apart from other dentists in the area. It is the culmination of everything within the office walls that defines what the practice stands for, from the welcome mat to the composite restorations.

PROMOTE THE PRACTICE.

Where does your practice show up in a google search of dentists in the area? Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is worth the investment. People search before they buy and look for great reviews of your practice online. Updating your website routinely by making it more patient-friendly with an interactive chat feature and interesting blog should be considered.

Shake up your dead content with some new posts that address problems, concerns, or interests that your patients have shared. Share what you are doing to improve your practice, showcase patient stories, and demonstrate how you helped them become healthy. Social media is a must to promote your practice. Whether it is your choice for Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, many of your patients will see you as connected to their world.

REMEMBER TO SMILE.

Smiles are free yet offer so much to those who give and receive them. Answering the phone with a smile tells the patient your office is a friendly place. Stand to greet your patients as they enter your office and always wear a big smile that says, "Welcome." Smile when you say goodbye and thank the patient for coming.

Administer CPR and watch your numbers grown!



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