

## Overcoming Obstacles to Treatment Acceptance

The Number One Obstacle — MONEY: **Think Long Term vs. Short Term**

The most difficult part of the consultation for many dentists (and staff) is presenting the fee and having the patients state that the fee is too high, or that they can't afford treatment. You want them to proceed with treatment because you know it is their best interests, but you also don't want them to feel as though you are pushing them to accept treatment.

Let's review an important psychological principle:

**People buy what they want and, not what they need.**

If patients perceive value and want the benefits that result from proceeding with treatment, they will find the money to pay for it.

When patients take exception to the fee, it does not necessarily mean that they will not accept treatment. It may simply be that they expected a lower fee, or that they had only budgeted a certain amount and now will have to re-arrange their finances. Many people simply need a little extra time to figure out how they want to pay for treatment.

The other common scenario is when patients do not perceive sufficient benefit to justify the cost in their own minds, so they say that the treatment is too expensive. This does not necessarily mean that they cannot afford it. However, it does mean that you probably could have done a better job presenting the benefits of implants and the consequences of missing teeth. Somehow you did not get them excited, or, motivated to proceed. This can often be resolved with a second consultation.

When patients have issues with the fee for treatment, try using the following questions to help them overcome the obstacle:

"If money were not an issue, is there any other reason you would not proceed with treatment?"

"If we were to develop an alternative treatment plan, which of your goals would you be willing to compromise?"

"Every other treatment option is a short-term solution that will require additional, more costly treatment later to achieve the results you want"

"Which aspects of your health, appearance, function and well-being are you willing to compromise in order to have the lowest possible cost?"

"Sales" is not a dirty word. It is defined as a process of facilitating a decision that someone wants to make that is in his/her best interest. It is not manipulation or coercion. Hard core sales will not work in dentistry and it is certainly not being recommended here. You do not have to "sell" implant dentistry per se. You simply need to help the patients make decisions that are in their best interests and there are some basic sales skills that can help you do this.

One of the most effective things you can do to end the initial consultation with a decision to proceed to the next step is the following:

**Ask for a decision - Then just be quiet!**

When you ask the patient for a decision to proceed with the next step, usually another appointment, be quiet. You let them off the hook if you say anything. They no longer have to make a decision.

If you ask *for* a decision and then keep quiet, you will get one of three responses:

1. Stall tactics
2. Objections
3. A decision to proceed (Sometimes in the form of a question like, "Can I do this in the morning, or Will my implant crown match my nice white teeth?"

The following is an example of how to handle the patients who hesitate when you ask for a decision:

Doctor:

"If you were going to proceed with treatment, when would you want to schedule the first procedure?"

Patient:

"Usually when patients have a problem like yours (describe the problem briefly) and we can provide the ideal solution, which provides long-term health benefits, such as preservation of the facial structures (etc.) they usually proceed with treatment right away. The fact that you are hesitating leads me to believe that you are uncomfortable making this decision. What exactly is making you uncomfortable?"

By far the most common "stall tactic" is:

**"I want to think it over"**

When this is the response, the patient usually needs more information. They are not quite ready to make a commitment. Don't let them leave the office with an "I don't know" or "I want to think it over" otherwise, you: may never get another opportunity to consult with them. Instead, find out exactly what they want to think over. You can't handle an objection unless you know what it is. If they need more information, you need to know what it is. It is usually a concern with money and it is better to deal with it now than several weeks later on the phone.

Consider scheduling second consultations on a routine basis for complicated cases. This gives the patient an opportunity to discuss finances with a spouse, and speak to implant patients as references. This is much more effective than putting patients into a "pending" treatment system that only works 25% of the time.

The following is very effective for introducing the concept of a second consultation:

"This is an important decision. Many of our patients like to have a chance to really think about everything before they make a decision. For that reason, we usually schedule a second consultation, at no charge about a week to ten days later. That way you have time to make a list of additional questions and talk to some of our implant patients. ..."

Objections are not indications that the patients are saying "no" to treatment. On the contrary, this usually means that they are seriously considering proceeding with treatment and just need, a little more information. Many times they need a little more convincing or justification, to rationalize the decision, they want to make.

Sometimes objections are raised because people feel that the decision was made so quickly in their minds that it just seems like everything is happening too fast and they want to slow down the pace a little. So they come up with a few objections just prior to making a commitment to proceed. When a patient raises an objection, you can use the following:

"Suppose we were able to resolve that issue, are there any other issues standing in the way of proceeding with treatment?"

"There are alternatives, but they won't look as good, feel as good, or last as long"

**Regardless of how you handle the objections, always remember that you are presenting your patients with the best that dentistry has to offer, and this is in their best interests. If you believe in what you are doing, your patients will feel your conviction and be comfortable in the knowledge that they are doing the right thing.**

Another effective way to handle the cost obstacle is to lower the risk out of implant treatment. Stand behind your work. Emphasize the confidence in your surgeon to the patients to reinforce their confidence in implant treatment.

### **The Four Reasons for Not Buying**

There are four main reasons that people decide not to buy something:

1. They don't trust you.
2. They don't feel that they have a need, or want what you are presenting.
3. They don't believe that what you are presenting offers more than the alternatives.
4. They aren't in a hurry to buy.

If you have followed the ideal consultation format, the cost obstacle should not be a major problem. These issues are handled during the consultation, as follows:

1. If you ask the appropriate questions and are thorough with the evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of treatment options, you can overcome the trust issue.
2. If you define the full scope of the problems associated with missing teeth, using photos, patients will feel that they have a need.
3. If you accurately determine the motivational factor and present the appropriate benefits and compare the advantages and disadvantages of conventional dentistry with implant treatment, especially bone preservation, they will believe that there are more advantages to implant treatment
4. That leaves "they aren't in a big hurry to buy." This is usually overcome by explaining that bone resorption is a process that continues until the missing roots are replaced with implants.

It is beneficial to emphasize the long-term health benefits of implants, as this helps the patients to justify the "investment in overall health, appearance, function and well-being" that patients make when they have implant treatment.

### **Specific Skills to Overcome Obstacles**

There are some specific skills that can be helpful when dealing with objections to treatment, which have been used successfully for many years in other businesses. These "sales" skills are extremely effective and can be applied easily to dentistry. We simply need to get over this aversion to acknowledging that a dental practice is also a business, and as such needs to function like one. This includes marketing and sales.