

## Senior Dental Implant Etiquette

By Nancy Friedman, the Telephone Doctor

My main thought is why would there even need to be a difference in service. Why do we need to write about the difference? Is there really a difference? Sadly there is. I've witnessed it myself. So following are some guidelines to help ease the pain for both the patient and the dental implant team.

The following tips are in no order of importance. They all, however, are important. And even if you are thinking to yourself, "This isn't our office, thank goodness," you might think again if you survey your patients.

1. **Patience** – This is the number one frustration of the senior set. They tend to feel as though others younger than them have little patience and sometimes no patience at all with them. Oh, it may not be that obvious to you, but often a manner of speaking that is second nature to you, may be perceived as being impatient to seniors. For example, what you consider to be merely a short answer may come across as being "snippy" to a senior, particularly when you don't use their name in the answer. Think about how you need to repeat a question that they didn't hear. Sometimes that repeated question conveys impatience because often it is accompanied with a tone or sigh that implies, "Geez, why do I need to repeat everything for you all the time?" Have a little more patience with the seniors. Remember, they have family and that family may need dental implants one day and you can want to count on them recommending you!
2. **Be Sure They Understand** – Unfortunately, a higher percentage of seniors are hard of hearing. Often, particularly if they don't like to wear a hearing aid, they are embarrassed to let you know they didn't hear or understand you. Take the time to be sure they thoroughly understand what you're explaining to them. Be sure the patient, senior or not, has absorbed everything you have said. Remember, just because they said they understand doesn't mean they did. You might ask them, nicely, to repeat what the instructions are or when the next appointment is or whatever the item is. Having a patient repeat back what they thought they heard is a great way to be sure they understand. Please be sure you ask in a very soft tone of voice so it's not as though you're in a courtroom.

3. **Memory Problems** – This is not confined to the senior set. (Frankly, none of these tips are confined to just the senior set.) All of us have, at one time or another, forgotten doctors' instructions. So while writing it down will help, making double, even triple sure they really understand what needs to be done on follow up is so important.
4. **Company Jargon** – Every profession has jargon they use. And that's fine. Using professional jargon with colleagues and staff will speed things along. However using jargon on a senior, or really any patient, can and will slow things down and confuse the issue.
5. **Speed is Not Success** – OK, let's face it, we're all busy, busy, busy. But being busy does not give us carte blanche to be rude. Slow down. Maybe not as slow as the senior you're working with at the time, but slow down. Remember, rushing threatens people. Acknowledge what they're saying. Look them in the eye. The faster you go, the more confusing it will get for them. Far better you do it right the first. Speed is not success. It's not a race to get rid of them. It's a chance to be nicer to someone.

So, what is old? A 30-year thinks a 55-year old is old. A 55-year-old thinks 70 is old. And 70-year olds think, well, you get the idea. At what age is old? At what age do we start losing patience with people? At what age do we start helping people understand? At what age do we start forgetting things and have a bad memory? At what age should we stop using company slang or jargon? And at what age should we realize that when we rush some one it threatens them?

Good Lord willing, you too will be a senior; whatever age that may be. And you too will want to be treated with patience, understanding and, most of all, respect.