



Professional Resources

Communication Considerations and Tools for Success: Balancing the Art, Science, and Business of Dentistry

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Delivery of successful restorations is dependent upon using effective communication strategies, tools, and technologies during the preoperative, operative, and laboratory fabrication stages. The balance of art, science, and business embodied by good communication produces the highest quality dentistry available. The following strategy represents a model that may be followed to provide effective team communication that results in quality patient care.

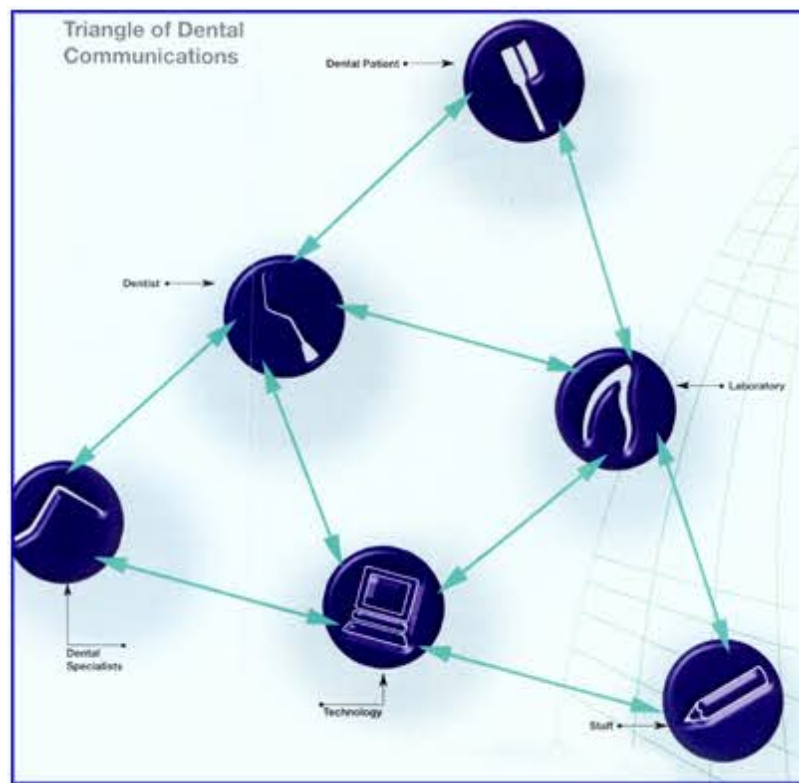


FIGURE 1. THE MODEL FOR SATISFIED PATIENTS. The ideal paradigm for communication in dentistry would resemble an equilateral triangle with the patient represented by the pinnacle and the dentist and laboratory specialists anchoring the corners. The specialists, staff, and technology would form two supporting triangles. All the elements of the triangles interact and flow together to support the most important part: the patient.

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FIGURE 2. DESCRIBING THE BENEFITS OF TREATMENT. Taking the time to describe the benefits of possible treatment methods in personal terms is a more effective form of persuasion than merely describing available dental techniques and materials (Table). X-rays and models are necessary diagnostic and treatment-planning tools that can also assist in refining the patient's expectations.



FIGURE 3. THE "YES" ANSWER. When a patient asks a question, the answer is almost always "yes," followed by an explanation of the risks and consequences associated with the chosen method of treatment. This patient wanted a brighter smile, and asked whether a bleaching treatment was available for her front teeth. The answer was "Yes, but bleaching will not change the color of teeth that were previously restored with a bridge."



FIGURE 4. UTILIZING PROPER COMMUNICATION TOOLS. Visualization is a powerful means of refining information related to the patient's needs, desires, and expectations. Once a treatment method has been decided upon, imaging software (eg, DentaGraphics, Toronto, Ontario) may be utilized to more effectively convey information that is essential to the patient's understanding of the outcome of the procedure and decision to proceed with treatment.



FIGURE 5. USING COSMETIC DENTAL IMAGING TOOLS FOR COMMUNICATION-CLOSE-UP. The Imaging Presentation Page from DentaGraphics incorporates a current image of the patient's smile in

close-up. This important tool presents the patient with a realistic idea of his or her "before" image.



FIGURE 6. USING COSMETIC DENTAL IMAGING TOOLS FOR COMMUNICATION -- PORTRAIT. Seeing a "before" and "after" image in portrait view presents the patient with a better idea of his or her actual smile, and provides an important tool with which to compare the expected and actual results obtained with treatment.



FIGURE 7. VISUALIZING THE OUTCOME - FACIAL. A close-up view of the expected outcome of treatment can be obtained using DentaGraphics visual imaging software. This view allows the patient to adjust his or her expectations to the anticipated actual result of treatment.



FIGURE 8. VISUALIZING THE OUTCOME -- SIDE VIEW. An image of the patient's smile after treatment is also available with the visual imaging software from DentaGraphics. This image strengthens the patient's understanding of the results that may be obtained, and enables the patient to see how the treatment plan will affect his or her overall appearance.



FIGURE 9. USING SMILE BLUEPRINT AS A PERSONALIZED COMMUNICATION TOOL. Smile Blueprint provides a more precise level of understanding, and is used as a personalized communication tool for the entire dental team. The blueprint is developed after treatment is accepted and financial arrangements have been made, but before beginning treatment.



FIGURE 10. ENSURING A COMMON AESTHETIC GOAL. Providing a personalized communication device such as Smile Blueprint ensures that all concerned parties from patient to dentist to staff to technician understand and agree upon a common aesthetic goal. The green outline indicates the proposed treatment overlaid on the original dentition.



FIGURE 11. REFINING THE TREATMENT GOALS. Smile Blueprint can also be used show the steps that are to be taken to accomplish the aesthetic goals agreed upon by the dental team. The blue outline shows the original dentition overlaying the restoration proposed in the treatment plan.

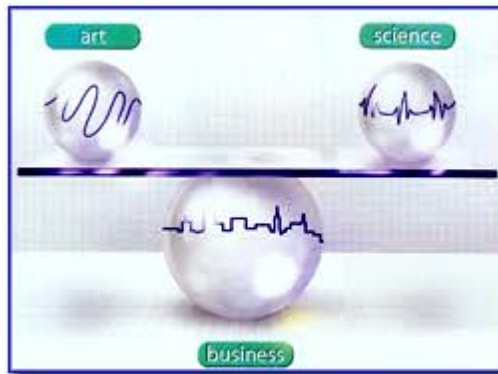


FIGURE 12. SHOWCASING THE ART, SCIENCE, AND BUSINESS OF DENTISTRY. This is a perfect example of the art, science, and business of dentistry being in balance the science of spectrophotometry perfects the art of shade match in a way that enhances the business of dentistry by reducing the need for costly remakes.



FIGURE 13. PRESENTING THE FINAL RESULT. The retracted view taken on the day of insertion shows the aesthetic results attain-able with effective communication from all members of the dental team. The natural and attractive aesthetics that make this patient smile help support the business of the dental practice.

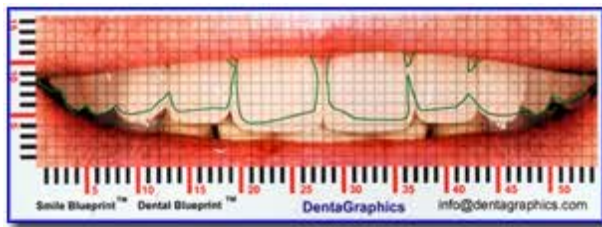


FIGURE 14. USING VISUAL IMAGING SOFTWARE IN TOOTH PREPARATION. The grid overlay enlarges the close-up of the restored dentition and provides a proportionally accurate grid (in millimeters) illustrating the dimensional changes necessary to prepare for the restoration. Both clinician and patient can precisely visualize the ideal changes required to achieve the planned aesthetics.

THE "BRAN" THEORY OF PATIENT COMMUNICATION



Benefits

Patients consent to dental treatment based on benefits. Effectively communicating the benefits to the patient is the first step: "By replacing your broken back teeth, Mr. Smith, you will be able to expand your diet, improve nutrition, and chew comfortably."



Risks

Combining the risks statement with the benefits statement enhances patient understanding and builds trust: "For you to smile more beautifully, we need to prepare this tooth for a crown. There is a possibility that a root canal will be required to position the tooth for maximum aesthetic results."



Alternatives

Perhaps for the sake of aesthetics and function, an implant-supported restoration is recommended. The patient deserves to know that an alternative -- something as simple as a removable partial denture -- exists, as well. This may not be the optimal treatment choice, but the patient has the right to make an informed decision.



No Treatment

Unfortunately, the patient is not always in a position to afford treatment. He or she may then decide upon the no-treatment option. It is difficult for a clinician to allow the patient to leave with no treatment, but the no-treatment option must be considered as a possibility.

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