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COMPLIANCE and Your Patient's Personality

In a busy dental office time can be scarce for dental hygienists to provide face-to-face education about self-care to patients. To ensure patients understand how their oral care practices at home function in an overall oral health care plan, dental hygienists must adopt a strategy for two-way communication that is informative and efficient.

Recognizing a patient's distinct personality type is one way a hygienist can communicate more efficiently with that patient. When a clinician understands how a patient wants to be spoken to, the clinician can tailor what is said—and how it is said—in a way that resonates with the patient's communication preferences.

One of four personality profiles describes most patients: dominant, interactive, steadfast, and conscientious¹. Though a patient may exhibit characteristics from more than one profile, one set of characteristics typically dominates that patient's personality.

Following are some of the cues that telegraph a patient's personality profile and the educational approaches that can be used to build higher levels of compliance among the different personality types.

Dominant

Successful career people often fit within the "dominant" category. Often they are entrepreneurs, executives, directors—individuals who place a high value on time. They are usually goal-oriented, and appear self-confident. Their communication is often marked by exchanges that are straight, blunt, and firm.

When you communicate with dominant personalities express yourself confidently and get to the point. Demonstrate your expertise and provide explanations about treatment in a clear, concise way. Be punctual. Provide this type of patient with options from which to choose and do not waste time on chatter. When you gain the confidence of a dominant personality that individual has the potential to be a good source of referrals to your practice.

Interactive

Energetic individuals who have positive outlooks and communicate well typically comprise the interactive personality type. These individuals are often found in highly social environments and are drawn toward careers in sales, performing, or teaching. They place a high value on being likeable. Image is very important for this personality type.

Be upbeat and enthusiastic when communicating with interactive personalities. Educate these individuals by using explanations that are simple, casual and informal. Treatment explanations should not be laden with confusing details.

Steadfast

These individuals are rarely in a hurry. A friendly, easygoing demeanor typifies the steadfast personality. They prefer harmonious environments, are typically averse to confrontation, and can be slow to adopt change.

It is imperative to build a trusting relationship with this personality type. Be patient and calm when working with steadfast personalities. If these patients appear tentative, take the time to fully explore their concerns and demonstrate your sensitivity to their needs. Steadfast patients are more likely to comply with self-care programs if they have faith in their dental hygienist.

Conscientious

There is a good chance the conscientious patient will have researched his or her oral health conditions prior to the office visit. These patients arrive informed and prefer to communicate with language that is clear and detailed. They are not averse to scientific terms and welcome the presentation of evidence-based diagnoses.

The dental hygienist should work to educate these patients in a way that is thorough and efficient. Conscientious patients feel empowered by knowledge and may resist making decisions until they feel they have all the facts.

Path to compliance

Oral health conditions ebb and flow with the effects of variables such as age, pregnancy, disability, or chronic disease. A patient's personality, however, is unlikely to change throughout decades of life. Engaging a patient "in their own language" draws a patient toward becoming more involved in a co-diagnosis. When patients help establish their own oral health goals they are more likely to achieve higher levels of compliance.

REFERENCE

1. Social Styles. <http://www.discmastery.com/social-styles.htm>. September 25, 2008. Accessed March 4, 2010.

GUM® Go-Betweens® Proxabrush Cleaners

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