



ORTHO2

Three Steps to Improving Your Patient Participation

One of the primary components to running an efficient orthodontic practice is patients' involvement and participation in the practice. For many practices, this component is often the most difficult to get right, and is often overlooked for a variety of reasons.

Customer service for many practices means that the customer is always right. However, when patients show up late for a twenty-minute appointment and have five broken brackets, doubling the appointment time, or demand to be seen for all their appointments when it's most convenient for them, the practice puts themselves in a hole that is tough to dig out. When we deliver great service to the "customer is always right" customer it is at the expense of the patients who are actually great participators in the practice.

I will confess, there is no secret sauce to resolve all your patient cooperation problems. However, what I have found is that you can improve this area in your practice tremendously by staying committed to these three steps in the beginning of each patient's treatment.

Step 1: The treatment coordinator should have excellent scripting at the initial exam, beginning the coaching process for what the practice expects of their patients. An example might be when the TC is showing the patient your beautiful office, and when she/he gets to the tooth brushing station they might say, "Mrs. Jones, Susan, this is our tooth brushing station. For your next appointment please feel welcome to show up five minutes prior to your appointment, head straight back here, and brush your teeth so that you are ready to go at your appointment time. It's very important to Dr. Alexander that we stay on time with all of your appointments, and making sure you are ready to go at your appointment time is a huge help." Notice I said "feel welcome to show up five minutes prior" as opposed to "please show up five minutes early." The new patient process should be welcoming and inviting, and we will get to more specifics in the following steps once the

patient has decided to start treatment in your practice.

Step 2: Have an appointment and scheduling form that is initialed and signed by your patients at the time they sign the informed consent and financial contracts. We don't want to bombard our patients with rules and regulations, so as we explain this form to our patients it's important to point out the many benefits that the patients receive due to their participation in the practice. It's a nice touch to link the patient's role in showing up on time, calling with broken brackets, etc., with a rewards system.

Step 3: After the braces are placed, assistants should be spending 10-15 minutes going over tooth brushing instructions, explaining proper care of the braces and/or appliances, and coaching the patients on the importance of calling the practice for any breakage. I like my assistants to also review the importance of showing up on time for their appointments brushed and ready to go. Ideally, the parents should be present for this coaching session.

Ultimately, the earlier and better you communicate with your patients, the better results you will have. Many offices I visit don't hit any of these steps, or they don't hit them consistently or as clearly as they could. They then wonder why they have a significant patient cooperation problem. The snowball effect is created where the poor cooperators of the practice dictate the level of customer service to an extent. The best way of reversing this effect is to implement these three steps consistently. ◉

by **Ryan Alexander**

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About the Author



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