



DID YOU KNOW?

The Patient Journey with Editor Adela Laverick

WIN Newsletter December 2021

I think we all recognise that when a patient embarks on an implant treatment plan, they embark on a journey. Implant treatment, even in its simplest forms, is generally a much more significant treatment for the patient than the routine dentistry they would have previously experienced. Implant treatment demands more of an investment from the patient not just in terms of cost, but also in regard to acceptance of the length of treatment time, inconvenience of multiple appointments, and possible post-operative discomfort. Alongside this are the less tangible psychological effects such as embarrassment about losing teeth, possible fear of unfamiliar treatments, and concern over whether expectations can be met.

Therefore, when patients agree to an implant treatment plan, it is critically important that we, as a Dental Team, are fully invested to support them on their journey—that we take time to get to know the patient and to understand their individual fears, concerns, and expectations, so that we can in turn support them not just as a patient, but also as an individual. Each member of the Dental Team can enhance the experience of the journey for the patient and can help to ensure that the patient feels cared for and valued.

Of course the patient's journey will usually start before they meet with a dentist or specialist. First impressions are often key to success. The importance of the first contact with the clinic should not be underestimated - be it a phone call, or a greeting from the receptionist. The 'front of house' staff are in a privileged position to be able to gauge how the

patient is feeling on that day and to then respond supportively: do they look nervous and need some reassurance? Would they like to know more about the clinician they are due to see? Or, would they just like somewhere quiet to sit with their own thoughts. The power of a perceptive receptionist should be recognised and encouraged to ensure that the first steps of the patient's journey are a success.

And, then of course, the receptionist will see the patient again directly after the appointment and may have to read an entirely different set of emotions: be it relief, concern, or confusion. In a brief interaction, the receptionist needs to read the patient's demeanour and if necessary, take action to follow up with the clinician and provide the 'wrap-around' care that truly shows understanding.

So where do the dental nurses fit in to the patient journey? By working beside the clinician, the dental nurse experiences all of the clinical interventions first-hand alongside the patient. Our dental nurses are invaluable team members because not only do they have to organise the surgery for the procedure, but they also have to look after both the patient and the clinician! I have often heard it said that surgeons can become very focused on the technical procedure and it is therefore critically important that the dental nurse is monitoring the patient's well-being and comfort throughout the procedure. In my experience, the dental nurse often becomes the patient's ally, and patients will look to the nurse, rather than to the dentist, for advice, for information and for sharing how they are feeling. This strong nurse-patient relationship also helps the dentist. It can take the pressure off of the dentist and give them time to focus on a technical matter, or it can just lighten the atmosphere during a challenging treatment session.

Another key member of the Dental Team is the technician. I have had the privilege to experience first-hand the value of the patient and technician meeting in person, rather than the technician being a faceless name in the laboratory. Once again, this interaction benefits both parties. For the technician to be able to meet the patient in person and to see the teeth within their natural smile, speech and facial expressions, gives valuable information that can only be gleaned in person. It also gives the technician an insight into the emotional importance of the teeth; if the technician values the work more because of this interaction, then the technical work is more likely to be a success. The patient will feel that they have yet another member of the team looking after their needs and will feel even more supported and valued because of this.

So, the most successful patient journeys will be those in which the entire Dental Team is invested in the care and well-being of the patient—where the patient feels understood, supported, and cared for at every turn of the journey and where the team is united to provide this high standard of care.

By choosing to become part of a patient's journey, by choosing to invest more time and energy into that patient's treatment, I believe that we as a team also benefit. For a short while, the patient becomes 'part of the family' and at the end of the journey they will in turn take time to share the joy and relief of a successful treatment. You will receive thanks, smiles and praise, and perhaps even be showered with positive feedback stories from friends and relatives.

'Teamwork makes the dream work!'