

Productnews

Are you boosting your patients' emotional bank accounts?

Janice Charlton discusses an interesting way to analyse the patient journey

The well-known trainer and author of *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey, uses the 'emotional bank account' as a great metaphor to understand our relationships with other people. This is also a powerful way of analysing the patient journey in your practice, helping you to understand the areas in which you can improve.

The emotional bank account works in the same way as a normal bank account – a mixture of deposits and withdrawals. A healthy bank account will benefit from lots of deposits and limited withdrawals, whereas an unhealthy bank account will suffer from the opposite.

This results in an overdraft, failed direct debits, and that sick feeling when you go to check your balance. The same applies with people. Healthy relationships thrive when we don't take too much from others but instead provide lots of deposits, such as compliments, keeping to arrangements and remembering important events like birthdays.

Within the dental setting, ensuring the emotional bank accounts of our patients are well deposited makes good business sense, too. The more deposits we make, the happier our patients are and the more forgiving they will be if we ever need to make a big withdrawal.

Think back to the last time you had to phone patients to rearrange appointments because a member of your clinical staff had called in sick. How did they react? An occasion like this would be classed as a rather large withdrawal from your patient's emotional bank account, and their reaction will give an indication about whether or not your dental practice is making enough deposits into those accounts.

Five simple adjustments that you can make

1. Most dental waiting areas are open plan, and the patients can see what's going on behind the reception desk. With this in mind, be careful of your facial expressions! We're all guilty of rolling our eyes, or giving a colleague a certain look, all of which can be easily picked up by patients while they wait for their appointments. Mask your feelings with a welcoming smile at all times, it makes people feel more reassured and happy while they are with you and acts as a lovely deposit in their emotional bank account

2. Always do what you say you're going to do; if you over promise and under deliver you will leave your patients feeling disappointed. For example, if you tell patients that you will soon be offering a particular treatment in the practice, make sure this is imminent rather than months off, or worse not quite yet confirmed. If a patient arrives for their next check up and you are still not able to offer that service it will lead to feelings of disappointment, which will act as a withdrawal from their emotional bank account. This applies to smaller instances too; if you say you will call to see how a patient is feeling post-treatment, make sure you do it! This will make them feel well cared for, leaving a deposit in their account
3. Never blame the patient for anything. Even if you know you sent that letter or made the follow-up call that they said they didn't receive, take a deep breath and apologise. Being adamant that you are in the right will make the patient upset, and would be a huge withdrawal on their emotional bank account
4. Always be sincere. Being open and honest with your patients is vital in any healthcare setting so be sure to adopt this approach in your dental practice. All members of your team should use eye contact when talking to patients; it will make them feel important while they are with you, leading to another nice deposit in that bank account
5. Listen carefully. We live in a fast-paced world where we often feel that people aren't listening to us or taking us seriously. A great way of demonstrating to a patient that you have listened to them is by repeating things back and providing them with choices and solutions based on what they have said. An example of making a deposit in this circumstance is to offer things like sedation if they feel nervous, or easy ways to pay if they are concerned about costs, such as dental plans or 0% finance. Providing no choices or options would be classed as a withdrawal and may make a patient look elsewhere for treatment.

Practice-branded solutions

Offering solutions to your patients needs is one thing, but being able to brand them with your own colours and

logos shows that the thought has come from within the practice, making patients feel cared for and that their feelings and concerns matter and have been considered by you as a practice.

A practice-branded dental plan is a great way of doing this and patients will feel welcomed into your family. They will appreciate the ability to spread the cost of their dental care into affordable monthly payments that allows them to visit for check ups when they are required, rather than when they can be afforded.

With Patient Plan Direct's low administration fees of just £1.20 per patient per month, you will also be able to pass those savings on to your patients through lower monthly payments compared to other providers. Now that's sure to make a big deposit in their emotional bank account! **D**



Janice Charlton fully understands the challenges of running a modern dental practice, she has vast practice management experience and is also a qualified dental therapist. She has supported hundreds of dentists and their teams across the UK in successfully establishing dental plans within their practices, whether offering a plan as an option to private fee per item, or considering a move out of the NHS.

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