

**Your Team
IS the Answer
for Sedation Success**

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The only thing worse than a terrified patient on the phone is a team member that is equally terrified of them on the other end. Why are they terrified? Because they lack the knowledge, skills, or systems necessary to convert this caller into a patient and they know how much time, money and sweat you have invested to reach and treat these people. (They do know how much you've invested, Right?)

Your Phone Team may actually be dreading the very calls you are spending money to generate. To prevent this double jeopardy (your team being afraid of the fearful patient on the phone), your team must become confident in discussing the safety, effectiveness, and benefits of Sedation Dentistry. They must also have systems and tools designed to manage the Sedation Patient from the first phone call through the completion of treatment. Structured systems and training allow your team to escort the fearful patient, confidently and safely through the entire sedation experience.

However, inadequately trained or equipped teams and the mistakes they make as a result, can have your office resembling a game show on TV - although it's not entertaining and nobody wins. If TV Guide were listing your office in the new Fall line-up, which game show would it be?

Jeopardy: Relies on the patient to ask the right questions in order to obtain correct, critical decision-making information.

Wheel of Fortune: The patient must spin the wheel to see if they can afford the New Patient Exam fee. When it stops on "Bankrupt" they must start trying to solve the puzzle all over again.

Fear Factor: The patient can receive the dentistry they need but they must first endure terrifying descriptions, words, sounds, and images before they even meet the Dentist.

Whose Line is it Anyway?: When talking to a high-fear patient on the phone, your team members make it up as they go.

Wipe Out!: Fearful patients cannot successfully navigate the obstacles in their path, especially the ones that keep changing. So they hang up without scheduling, or even better, schedule but don't show up.

The Amazing Race: The distance your patient would have to travel outweighs their perceived value of your dentistry.

Biggest Loser: When the team is not adequately trained, is it the Dentist or the fearful patient?

Obviously your practice is not a game show. It's a real place that offers Sedation Dentistry to real people who can't, or won't, receive dental care without it. So, how can you avoid the above pitfalls and create a profitable practice where everyone wins?

When your advertising reaches these patients they often have renewed hope that their conditions, and lives, can be improved. The first contact they have with your office either builds or destroys that hope. Fearful patients really want to see if they can trust you to do what your advertising says you can. In order to build that trust, you must ***Connect before you Collect.***

Connect with the patient and their need or situation before you collect identifying information, insurance information or money. Successful offices are sensitive to the fact that these patients are often sharing intimate information and fears that even their spouses may not know about. What occurs on the telephone must be consistent with the tone of your advertising. Teams must be familiar with their sedation marketing and realize the expectations that it has created in the caller. For example, “You said that you heard us on the radio. So, you are interested in Sedation Dentistry?”

As a Specialized Team Trainer with RAMP, I get an inside look at practices around the country that offer hope, and by hope I mean sedation. Offices that experience the most success in converting marketing driven phone calls into production have a number of things in common.

First and foremost, they understand that Sedation Patients are different. Therefore, the way they view, speak with and treat these patients is also different. They have adapted or created systems, policies and attitudes that meet the needs of the fearful patient.

Successful offices ensure the caller gets the correct information to make the decision to become *your* patient. Correct answers ***and*** correct questions are categorically important. Experienced teams lead the conversation and ask open ended questions. They ***answer*** the questions the caller doesn’t even know they need to ask. For example, “Let me tell you what to expect during your first appointment” or “This will be the fee for your visit that day”.

Successful offices do not charge new patients a fortune for the first appointment. A fair, modest fee requires the patient to make a commitment but does not become the obstacle they use as another excuse to avoid the dentist.

Successful offices realize that fear responses can be triggered by words, sounds, images, and even surprises. Fear is the factor that has kept these patients from receiving necessary dental treatment for years. Skilled team members use *fear-patient-friendly* terminology. Words that elicit visions of sharp, “pokey” things are out. They also provide enough information to prevent surprises, because fear of the unknown can be as swaying as dental fear.

Well-trained team members in successful offices confidently discuss Sedation. They encourage the patient while continuously reassuring them of their Dentist’s expertise, compassion and experience with patients who are “just like them”. Individual needs are considered and addressed, but the conversation is controlled and purposeful since improvisation rarely works when talking with fearful patients.

Successful practices don't have "Wipe Outs" on their schedule. It is crucial to have clear scheduling guidelines for the high-fear patient's first appointment. Be unambiguous about what you expect from the patient and what they can expect from you during their first visit. Tell them **what will happen** and **what will not happen**. If it is unclear to a patient what to expect at the first appointment, expect them not to come.

Recently, I heard a phone team member discourage a potential patient. This self-described "baby" was trying to schedule her first appointment. The team member stated, "If we have time, we may get to clean your teeth". Needless to say, she did not schedule. Many fearful patients want to have their teeth cleaned while they're sedated!

Another key element in preventing "Wipe Out" is to understand why the prospective patient called your office in the first place. What did they see or hear about you that triggered them to call? What do you offer that is important to them? Well-trained team members will identify their needs quickly and tailor the conversation accordingly. This makes it more likely that the fearful patient will keep their scheduled appointment.

Successful team members have innovative replies to common objections. It's amazing how easily some team members fold when patients play the "That's too far" card. When faced with the threat of a patient not scheduling due to distance issues, a team may reply: "Yeah, you probably don't want to drive that far. I understand. I wouldn't either. Hey, maybe there is another Sedation Dentist closer to you?" A well-trained team may reply, "We realize that's a good distance but you will be glad you traveled after you meet Dr. Wonderful. We have many great patients who travel from similar distances to see us. We can make special arrangements for you to stay in town overnight to receive your treatment. We have even given complimentary gas cards to patients scheduled for sedation."

Everybody wins when the team is well-trained. Many great training resources exist in the world of Sedation Dentistry. Successful offices have taken advantage of them. They also seek continuing training opportunities to keep up with the advancements and improvements in Sedation Care, and continually strive to improve office systems and individual skills.

While Dentistry is not a game, there is a "prize" at stake. Diseases and disorders of the mouth are serious and affect overall health. Sedation Dentistry allows the high-fear patient to improve and maintain their oral health, overall well-being, and quality of life. Proper training allows your team to deliver this "prize" to patients that seek your help.

Your Team may need additional training or systems if you answer "No" to any of these questions:

- Does your team know what your advertising promises?
- Do you have a set fee for New Patient Exams that requires a commitment from patients but is not an obstacle?

- Can your phone team confidently explain what to expect at the first visit without using terms that will turn away a fearful patient?
- Do you have a set fee for Sedation that your front office can quote with conviction?
- Does your phone team put emphasis on connecting with your patient above collecting information?
- Do you have a tracking method that accounts for patients who report more than one referral source?

You can also identify the aspects of your office that need improvement by tracking the progression (or lack thereof) of sedation patients from the initial call through completion of treatment. Effective tracking includes the following:

- Does your advertising drive (the right) new patient calls to your office?
- Do they call but don't schedule?
- Do they schedule but don't keep the appointment?
- Do they keep the appointment but don't accept treatment?
- Do they accept treatment but don't get approved for financing (or don't understand why you want to get paid for doing their dentistry)?

When you provide appropriate training for your team, they will enjoy being able to provide life changing Dentistry to high-fear patients. Then, a profitable practice where everyone wins becomes a *reality*.

Available Resources:

- The best way to train and equip your team for successful implementation of Sedation Dentistry is by attending a DOCS course *together*. Your Team plays a major role in performing Sedation safely, effectively and legally in your office. There is just "no better way" to educate, motivate and prepare them for the changes that will occur in your office when you begin offering Sedation Dentistry.
- The DOCS Team Training video is essential if your Team has not been to a DOCS course. It can be used to train new employees as well as refresh existing team members on important aspects of Sedation Care.
- The Sedation Dentistry Guidebook (SDG) from DOCS may be sitting on your shelf untouched. This contains vital information for treating, tracking and retaining sedation patients, as well as training your team on how to think like a fearful patient. Included in the SDG are the *New Patient Call Sheet*, the *Brag Pack* and *Meeting in a Box*, which are fundamental components of Sedation Patient management. The SDG also contains a link to the DOCS Education website where you can access updated information and electronic versions of this material.
- RAMP clients have unlimited access to Online Phone Skills Training. This unique, 90 minute (CE) course focuses on the skills necessary to convert calls to Sedation Patients.

- RAMP clients have access to Specialized Team Trainers who provide customized training that addresses the needs identified by reviewing real, prospective patient calls generated from your Sedation advertising.

About the Author:

Elizabeth is a Specialized Team Trainer with RAMP. She graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1992 with a B.S.N. The majority of her experience is in Critical/ Intensive Care. Elizabeth has been Practice Manager of her husband's Dental office, Bryan A. Griffith DMD, PSC, since 1999.