

Save £££s with YOUR Payment Plan

Karen Hawkins, practice manager at Beechcroft Dental Practice, Wokingham, discusses how a practice-branded payment plan can help attract and retain patients in these difficult times

As dental attendance figures continue to fall and the financial pressure on dental practices grows, increasing numbers are seeking innovative ways of safeguarding income and ensuring their appointment book remains full.

There are several reasons why patients fail to attend routine appointments and more often than not cost is the prime concern, alongside time, anxiety, previous bad experiences and a lack of oral health awareness. Money set aside for dental procedures, should be considered a necessity for patients and their oral health.

Many people won't think twice about purchasing the latest gadget or fashionable accessory but when it comes to the cost of oral care, this is often one area which is neglected. That is, until their oral health deteriorates so much that a visit to the dentist is inevitable.

As practice manager of Beechcroft Dental Practice, a key priority for me is to ensure patients avoid such last-resort situations and are able to afford regular visits as well as specialist treatment if required.

When I joined Beechcroft in 2006, the practice was in the process of re-evaluating various practice procedures and we found the costs associated with our existing payment plan provider were too expensive. Since our ultimate goal was to reduce administrative costs, for the ultimate benefit of the patient, we decided to take the leap and convert to a new payment plan provider.

Ideal solution

We researched different plan providers to try and discover who could provide the best solution for our practice and as a group decided that converting to DPAS was the ideal solution. It wasn't just the low administration fees that attracted us to this provider; a key selling point was that with DPAS we had the ability to develop a practice-branded payment plan.

The conversion went smoothly and our main concern was ensuring patients were informed of the transfer and treated with the utmost care, encouraging them to convert to our new payment plan if they wanted to make a saving.

It was important to the whole team that we educated patients on the planned changes, placing great emphasis on the fact that patients would continue to receive the same standard of care, but that there were some considerable savings to be made with the new DPAS practice-branded plan.

Our main challenge was that our previous plan was nationally branded and instantly recognised by patients, so trying to sell our own plan did require further explanation and took some effort to educate the patients.

In these circumstances, DPAS was extremely supportive, producing and distributing invitations, follow-up letters, patient literature and leaflets; all branded with our practice details. The result was fantastic and today we currently have 730 patients signed up to our practice-branded Care Plan.

Our most successful plan has been the DPAS membership plan.

An advantage of working with DPAS was the ability to brand this as the Beechcroft Member Scheme (BMS) and to completely personalise the plan to suit our needs as a business.

The result is an extremely attractive package



The team at Beechcroft Dental Practice

which our patients can benefit from all year round, at an affordable monthly fee.

In addition to two dental examinations, two hygienist visits, X-rays, supplementary insurance and a 24-hour helpline, patients benefit from 15% discount on all treatment (excluding specialist) as required and uptake of the BMS plan has been highly successful.

Our patients really appreciate the benefits of being on the BMS; they are able to budget for visits and spread the cost of maintenance visits over the year plus they get emergency and insurance cover. We know that if patients are paying for treatment in advance they are more likely to attend for appointments, reducing our 'fail to attends' while offering reassurance to the whole team that we have a regular source of income.

The practice is guaranteed a regular income and, although we have discounted treatment by 15%, the increase in uptake has more than made up for the shortfall and that is what's important!

Our first patient joined BMS in March 2009 and we have been very proactive building the plan.

Admittedly, it took a while to promote the scheme, but 18 months later we now have 470 signed up. On average, we have about 20-30 patients join the scheme per month, our highest month being 47.

In fact, BMS has proved so successful that all new plan patients are automatically signed up to this scheme and we no longer offer the Care Plan, except in exceptional circumstances i.e. if the rest of the family is on Care Plan.

At Beechcroft Dental Practice, we are delighted to be able to offer our patients a cost-effective way of budgeting for their dental care and believe this provides the best chance of maintaining a healthy

mouth and preventing the need for extensive treatment, while improving patient loyalty in the process.

We will survive

In these uncertain economic times, we are seeing positive results, and we know we'll survive through the recession because of our payment plans.

It's an advantage we have over other dental practices and I'd advise all practices looking to help patients financially while securing their own income, to seriously consider the benefits of a practice-branded payment plan.

Promoting BMS is now a part of what we do and this is how it should be for all practices!

DPAS payment plans offer practices an administrative service and account support that is the lowest cost of any of the three major providers. This means that practices choosing a DPAS payment plan are saving an average of £10,000* per year for every 1,000 patients they have on plans, when compared to a leading competitor. For more information on practice-branded payment plans please call DPAS on 01747 870910 or visit www.dpas.co.uk *Source: DPAS & Denplan official pricing literature 2010

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