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Serving the Dental Industry

# Hot Buttons

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## How Well is Your Practice Doing? Using Patient Surveys to Gauge Satisfaction

Have ever wondered what your patients think of your practice and your staff? Why not ask? Don't listen to that old tape that runs through your head from childhood warning you not to ask how someone likes you because you're afraid they may tell you that they don't! The information you can learn from a survey is invaluable for managing and marketing your practice, and you may even be surprised by some of the answers.

### A Patient Survey: What and Why

A patient survey is a relatively simple tool that can be used to supplement your marketing plan and to provide you with valuable information and feedback. To make the survey results as beneficial as possible, spend a little time up front contemplating what information you would like to gain. What aspects of your practice may need attention and improvement? For example:

- Are your patients generally satisfied with the service you provide them?
- Do you provide the types of treatment they expect from you?
- Do they appreciate hearing about new technology?
- How is your staff's customer service?
- Are your patients comfortable talking to you about their oral health problems?

- What dental problems cause them the most trouble?
- Are they satisfied with the payment arrangements you provide for them?
- Would they refer a neighbor or friend to your practice?

From your survey, you can find out who makes the oral health care decisions in the family, if they want new technologies presented to them, how well they understand the correlation between their dental health and their overall health, their take on the parking arrangements at your office, what they think of your office décor, and more.

### Create a Survey

It is important to respect your patients' time. And because you want a high response rate, make the survey concise, short and to the point. As an incentive for returning the survey, offer some sort of reward or gift—at least a thank you. Make the survey easy to complete and submit. You also want to make it clear that the main purpose of the survey is to better meet the needs of your patients. You want to serve your patients using the best staff and current treatment techniques, all in a pleasant atmosphere. Decide how you want the patient to return the survey: via mail, fax—or if you have a patient-friendly website—put the survey online. You do not have to survey all your patients.

A sample patient survey is included at the end of this article for you to use as a template.

*Hot Buttons* is published several times a year and is available to clients and friends of Schenck SC at no charge. For name and address corrections, or to receive the newsletter electronically, please call Anne Dlugopolski at 800-236-2246, extension 1167, or email [anne.dlugopolski@schencksc.com](mailto:anne.dlugopolski@schencksc.com).

All dates for events are subject to change; please call for confirmation. All articles in this newsletter are general in nature; we urge you to contact us for personal advice before you act.

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## Patient Surveys

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### How to Use the Survey Results

Don't let the information you gain from the survey go unattended. Evaluate what your patients tell you.

Do they want more time with you? Are they interested in hearing how new and current technology can improve their dental health? Did they express specific concerns they would like addressed? Are your office hours convenient?

From the information you gain, concentrate on satisfying those patient needs. Discuss the responses with your staff and brainstorm how your practice can either improve on what your patients suggested or continue the good service you provide. If a patient signs their name to the survey and they express a concern, be sure to contact them and discuss it. For example, if a patient expresses the desire to hear more about implants, be sure to make a note of it and discuss implants the next time they come into the office. Better yet, call them and make an appointment for a consultation. If they indicate that they have not been in your office for some time, call and set up an appointment.

If patients have suggestions, consider them. Do not shy away from negative responses. Take them seriously and contact the person to hear more about the situation so you can make it right. That way, a potentially negative situation can become a positive one. Remember, a dissatisfied patient will tell everyone about their problem. When they leave your practice, they will take others with them. The bad words will be spread. But a satisfied patient—one whose problem has been handled with ease and finesse—will sing your praises.

### Survey Timing and Target

Because there are a number of matters you would like to ask your patients, you may want to conduct several patient surveys with different types of patients several times a year. A practice I know takes about 25 names at random from the

patient roster and surveys a different group each month. Or, you can be more direct by targeting specific groups of patients. Ask questions that relate directly to their circumstances.

**Survey your *new patients*** asking general questions like these:

- What dental problems cause the most trouble?
- What would you most want to achieve in your dental care?
- Describe the perfect dentist.
- What factors most influence you when choosing a dentist?
- What are your overall dental needs?
- Have you seen our advertising?
- What influenced you the most to choose our practice?

**The parents of *young patients*** may share:

- Are your children happy with their smile?
- Have you ever considered braces for your children?
- What do your children snack on?
- Do your children wear mouth guards when they participate in sports?
- Does your child's school invite dentists to talk to classes about dental health?

**Survey your *elderly patients*** to find out:

- Are you aware of advances in dentistry that help you look younger, feel better and stay healthier?
- What is your most troublesome dental problem?
- Do you think we are responding well to your needs?

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## Patient Surveys

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- What improvements in your dental health would make you feel better about yourself?
- Do we provide enough varieties of payment methods to meet your needs?
- Do you have friends in nursing homes who need treatment?

Survey your *longstanding patients* and ask:

- Would you be willing to refer us to a friend or neighbor?
- Are our practice hours convenient for you and your family?
- Have we addressed your dental needs to your satisfaction?
- Have we communicated with you clearly and effectively?
- Do we explain your proposed procedures sufficiently?

You may want to ask several of the same questions to each group. These could relate to your décor, your insurance and

payment options, their satisfaction with your “chair-side behavior,” and how often they visit your website, read your newsletter and pass your brochure on to others. Be sure your questions fit the responses you make available on the survey.

### Conclusion

Do not be reluctant to ask your patients what they think! It gives you the opportunity to capitalize on what you do well, what makes you stand out from your competition, what improvements could be made and how you can better serve your patients.

Blow your own horn. You have bragging rights. Your patient survey will help confirm what you knew all along... you're really good! But it also can give you a boost to move into new communication methods, address concerns that have been expressed and put a spark in your marketing plan.

## Tobacco Cessation Counseling by Dentists

### Helping Patients Quit

Oral health professionals are in a unique position to provide tobacco cessation interventions with patients. Dental providers have the advantage of frequent contact with a patient over an extended period of time, which can lend support to a patient's attempts to quit. Tailored health messages and the dental professional's advice to quit tobacco use can stimulate quit attempts. Even a brief, simple clinical intervention strategy can substantially improve a patient's tobacco quit rates.

Counseling patients and recommending behaviors conducive to good oral health is an everyday occurrence with dentists. Recommending smoking cessation is certainly among the topics for consideration. Smoking cessation is an important preventative measure to address periodontal disease and dental caries. Through counseling, educational materials, prescribing and administering drugs and making referrals, dentists can influence their patients because they frequently visit the dentist for preventive-oriented care.

### Barriers to Providing Cessation Services Reduced

In the past, one of the major barriers to implementing tobacco cessation programs was the question of if this type of counseling and prescribing was overextending the scope of the practice of dentistry. In December 2009, the Dentistry Examining Board legal counsel of the Department of Regulation and Licensing issued an opinion stating, “The diagnosis and treatment of dental diseases that are caused by or the result of the use of tobacco products by dental patients is within the scope of the practice of dentistry.” Therefore, it is appropriate for dentists to include tobacco cessation recommendations as part of the oral health treatment plan for patients who smoke.

Other barriers may include fear of alienating patients, a lack of intervention skills and supportive materials, a lack of training, reimbursement, or confidence in the ability to help patients, not knowing where to send patients for counseling and the amount of time required. These barriers can be reduced by enrolling in classes and obtaining the confidence needed to proceed with a

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## Tobacco Cessation Counseling

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program that will help patients with their struggle to kick a nasty and harmful habit.

### Benefits of Cessation Interventions

There are, of course, many benefits to quitting smoking, not only to a patient's oral health, but also in their everyday life. Therefore, the dentist and dental staff should, as a matter of course, take a positive approach and assist their patients with the motivation and means of quitting smoking. Here are a couple of benefits. Your staff can likely identify many more from their personal experience with their patients:

- Savings in dental procedure costs for patients without periodontal disease.
- The cost of cessation treatment is minimal in comparison to the cost of periodontal disease treatment.
- Time taken to provide effective cessation counseling intervention is 3–5 minutes vs. hours to complete periodontal procedures.
- Cessation medications and effective counseling interventions double/triple success rates in patients quitting tobacco.

### Code for Cessation Counseling

The ADA recognized the role of dentists and dental office staff in discouraging tobacco use by passing resolutions encouraging dentists to advise their patients about oral and systemic hazards of smoking and using chewing tobacco.

Included in editions of the ADA Current Dental Terminology for many years, even earlier than 2004, is the dental code **D1320**. This code is to be used for "tobacco counseling for the control and prevention of oral disease." This code, however, is not reimbursed by dental benefit plans. As a result, the patient is responsible for the cost.

### Why Train Dental Providers to Perform Cessation Interventions?

Training removes many of the barriers that dentists and staff encounter when embarking on the road to be proactive in tobacco cessation with their patients, and increases the number of interventions performed. The US Public Health Services Guidelines for Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence outlines effective tobacco cessation counseling strategies. By using the USPHS Guidelines, dental providers may double or even triple their success rates of patients quitting tobacco. Incorporating identification of tobacco use into medical/dental records will increase the likelihood of providing cessation interventions.

It makes sense that dental providers who receive tobacco cessation training will be more likely to provide cessation services to their patients than those who do not become trained. The resources listed below will assist in removing some of the barriers to tobacco cessation interventions.

### Resources

#### *For Clinicians*

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines for smoking cessation are now taught as part of the Marquette University School of Dentistry curriculum. See <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/tobacco/clinhlpsmksqt.htm>.
- To see the clinical guidelines recognized by the American Dental Association, visit the ADA website at [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org).
- The Wisconsin Dental Association website also contains valuable information – see [www.wda.org](http://www.wda.org).
- The Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention has a free web-based course for treating tobacco use and dependence at the University of Wisconsin - Madison.

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## Tobacco Cessation Counseling

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- Refer to [http://www.ctri.wisc.edu/HC.Providers/healthcare\\_dentists.htm](http://www.ctri.wisc.edu/HC.Providers/healthcare_dentists.htm).
- Watch for the fall 2010 seminar schedule on tobacco cessation training sponsored by Delta Dental of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Dental Association.

### *For Patients*

The ADA website has numerous valuable articles and information on smoking cessation for the public. See [http://www.ada.org/public/topic/smoking\\_tobacco.asp](http://www.ada.org/public/topic/smoking_tobacco.asp).

Patients can be referred to the toll free Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line - 877-270-STOP (7867). The Quit Line offers:

- Expert counseling for anyone who wants to quit smoking. This may include helpful calls directly to the person during the quit attempt.
- Self-help materials.
- Information for friends and family.
- Referrals to local quit smoking programs and services.

All materials are free.

## Attending the WDA Jewel of the Great Lakes Conference?

### **Visit Schenck at Booth 501, Next to the Internet Cafe**

Schenck will once again be the Sapphire Sponsor of the WDA's Jewel of the Great Lakes Conference on May 6 and 7 at the Midwest Airlines Center in Milwaukee. Stop by our booth to visit with dental consultants Maryann Dillon, Mike Metz, Jim Tripp and Dave Wagner. Plus, visit the Internet Cafe at booth 600 to mingle with colleagues, check email, and stay in touch with co-workers, office, family and friends while you're at the show!



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Mike Metz, Practice Management Consultant  
Florian Smits, Practice Management Consultant  
Jim Tripp, Practice Management Consultant  
Dave Wagner, Practice Management Consultant

# Sample Patient Survey

At [Practice Name], we value your opinion regarding the quality of our customer care. Your views will help us better serve you and our other patients. To offer you the best possible service, we need to know your opinion on how we are doing. It isn't important to include your name unless you wish. We keep all of our patient information completely confidential.

Our survey is short and shouldn't take too much of your time. All you need to do is to select the box that best reflects your answer to the question, from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1). Feel free to make comments if you wish. Please return the survey to us via fax at XXX-XXX-XXXX, or mail it to [address].

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
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## Our Practice Hours and Work Days

1. Our practice hours and the days we are open are convenient	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If not, how could they be improved? \_\_\_\_\_

## Our Reception and Waiting Room

2. The reception staff is friendly and helpful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The reception staff provides relevant information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The waiting area is nicely decorated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The reception area is welcoming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. There is adequate seating in the reception area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. The seating is comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. A good selection of magazines is available	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The room is clean	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Your Dentist and Hygienist

10. I am comfortable talking to my dentist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. My dentist listens carefully to what I say	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. My dentist explains my treatment clearly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. My dentist provides me with treatment options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. My dentist/hygienist gives me advice on dental home care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
15. The dentist gives me advice that is easy to follow and carry out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. My dentist keeps pain and discomfort to a minimum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. The hygienist is pleasant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. My teeth cleanings are thorough	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. My hygienist is helpful in explaining what she/he is doing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. My hygienist discusses my dental health and the condition of my teeth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. My hygienist keeps pain and discomfort to a minimum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Your Insurance and Our Payment Options</b>						
22. The staff works well with my insurance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. The staff is helpful in pursuing difficult claims to obtain payment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. The payment options are convenient for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. I find payment by credit card useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Complaints are handled quickly and efficiently	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Our Literature and Communication</b>						
27. The practice newsletter is informative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. The practice brochure clearly explains the services we provide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. The website is useful for referring other patients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. The website offers useful information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. I would refer a friend and/or relative to your practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**And Finally...**

How could we better serve you? \_\_\_\_\_

**For more information, contact:**

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