

Recall Systems in Dental Practice

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Abstract

Maintenance of good dental health and the provision for the opportunity to recommend the best possible preventive dentistry is what a periodic recall system actually provides. At each recall visit patient is been re-educated and motivated, and is informed about the treatment plan, diagnosis and the treatment. To bring the patient to optimal dental health an effort is made continuously in terms of presentation. Various recall visits are generally for those patients who are in excellent dental health and who have completed the optimal dentistry. An ideal recall visit is the source of utmost satisfaction to the patient, dentist and the dental hygienist. Thus, this article focuses on various recall systems and their success.

Keywords: Dental, Recall, Practice, Motivation, Visits

Introduction

The most commonly used phrase in dentistry is “Visit your dentist twice a year”. Saving more teeth and promoting the best dental health are the potentials provided for patients. It is an opportunity for the pursuit of excellence in dental care for a dentist as well as attracts the patients who genuinely appreciate the finest dentistry possible. [1]

Maintenance of good dental health and the provision for the opportunity to recommend the best possible preventive dentistry is what a periodic recall system actually provides. Clean the teeth and take a checkup x-ray is not only the purpose of a recall visit but also in the course of many recall visits, it is essential to do both. In aspect of good dental health, the recall visit should be very specific in providing for the maintenance.[2]

At each recall visit patient is been re-educated and motivated, and is informed about the treatment plan, diagnosis and the treatment. To bring the patient to optimal dental health an effort is made continuously in terms of presentation. All this should be very clear in its purpose and the patient should understand that with the growing age, re-examination of dental health is very necessary in order to avoid deterioration of the old dentistry.

“Divided prescription plan” is where the patient already has a holding program in his hand, which is duly accepted and done earlier, and further needs to continue the program at periodic intervals. A current examination is required to ensure that the original

divided plan is still valid. Then further, decision is been made to go ahead with a specific section of treatment and progressing towards the optimal dental plan. Contributing to the patient’s optimal dental health this is one of the most important functions of the recall system.

Various recall visits are generally for those patients who are in excellent dental health and who have completed the optimal dentistry. This kind of purpose is referred as prophylaxis. Benefits of good dentistry and encouragement to continue with their further dental plan are the two major things for the above-mentioned patients. As a good dental missionary, the patients must be able to tell their friends and relatives what good dentistry actually is and encourage them to avail the benefits of good dental health.[3]

Guidelines for recall

The recommended interval between oral health reviews should be determined specifically for each patient, and tailored to meet his or her needs, based on an assessment of disease levels and risk of or from dental disease. The interval before the next oral health review should be chosen, either at the end of an oral health review if no further treatment is indicated, or on completion of a specific treatment journey.

The recommended shortest and longest intervals between oral health reviews are as follows:

1. The shortest interval between oral health reviews for all patients should be 3 months.

2. The longest interval between oral health reviews for patients younger than 18 years should be 12 months.
3. The longest interval between oral health reviews for patients aged 18 years and older should be 24 months.

For practical reasons, the patient should be assigned a recall interval of 3, 6, 9 or 12 months if he or she is younger than 18 years, or 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21 or 24 months if he or she is aged 18 years or more.[4]

Types of Recall Systems (Scheduling the Recall Visit) [5]

Many dentists say that no system is perfect; any of the mentioned recall systems can be used. The mostly common recall systems are Advanced Appointment System, The Telephone Recall System, The Mail Recall System and Combination of mail and telephone recall system.

1. Advanced Appointment System

Recall appointments are scheduled before the patient leaves the office. This is an advanced appointment schedule. Some management experts are against this system as people find it difficult to predict their schedules 6 months prior. There can be a situation chaos if the patient or hygienist is absent from the work place and misses a schedule. Advocates of this system feel that many patients are well versed with their routines and the time on which their appointment is fixed is generally apt for them.

Advantages

- There is no cost involved
- Administrative assistant requires no time
- Simple

Disadvantages

- Future commitments are not know by the patients

2. Telephone Recall System

The immediate response is initiated by the telephone recall system, as the administrative assistant contacts each patient through a telephonic conversation to schedule a recall appointment. For a new practitioner, this system can be a good practice builder, but at the same time, it can be time-consuming and exhausting as well in a settled practice.

The administrative assistant while having a telephonic conversation should use phrases that do not devalue the service. "For your checkup" or "For your cleaning" Phrases, as these should be eliminated. Words like 'prophylaxis' and

'examination' are found cumbersome for some assistants as they feel the terms are too technical and the importance of the recall visit is not fulfilled. Time should be taken out to inform patient that this is an important preventive service.

A. Preventive recall appointment

Telephone system is proved as an effective technique that provides personal contact with the patient as these days many people have answering machines or voice mails which further allows you to leave messages.[6]

Firm insistence and a positive approach are required in a telephone technique not only for the need of an appointment but also at the time of the appointment.

Advantages

- Response from the patient should be immediate
- Practice Builder

Disadvantages

- It might not get any answers
- It might be unable to reach patient
- It may disturb the person been called
- It is time consuming in a larger practice
- The responsibility for most of this system is on the administrative assistant

3. Mail Recall System

Patient is responsible for making the appointment in the mail recall system. Patients receive a card that(1) They have to contact the office people to schedule a preventive recall appointment or(2) The appointment time is given to them and further they have to confirm it.

Words like cleaning or check-up should not be used and the card should even emphasize on the prophylaxis. At the previous visit, either the patient addresses the card or the office manager does it. The latter management can be proved very effective as the patients are able to recognize their own handwriting and this may confirm their interest in the recall system. In a large practice, the mail recall system can be very advantageous.[6]

Advantages

- Responsibility is on the patient
- Reminders are kept visible

Disadvantages

- There is a possibility to ignore notice
- Postage cost
- There is lack of immediate response

4. Combination of Mail and Telephone Recall System

The mail and phone combination is very effective. Prior to the call, the mail reminder sets the mood for scheduling the appointment. The two main benefits are-

- (1). Eliminating the need for a phone call, the patient might call and schedule
- (2). It gives a reminder to the patient for expecting a call

Establishing a Recall System

The administrative assistant should set up a recall file that is simple and that should be done once the recall system has been determined. Recall system that is managed electronically is the most efficient.

1. Electronic Recall Files

The most valuable component of a recall system is the computer. The software system generates a list of patients who need to be contacted with the use of an electronic file. For pre-prepared cards the computer can produce the actual letter, card or mailing labels. Administrative assistant can generate a master list of patients and their contact numbers if at all the office uses telephone recall system.

2. Follow-Up

If patients are called on routine basis then it is vital. Patients should know how the recall system works and how they will be notified before they leave the office.

3. Purging the System

The recall records should be purged periodically with any other record management system. Such a system must be incorporated electronically for patients who have not been recalled over a period of years. In order to avoid any kind of possibility of litigation for negligence, the patient must be informed by the administrative assistant that the particular records are being removed from the system of the dental office.

It is very essential to send a letter or a note to the patient informing about that the records are being removed from the recall system of the dental office; hence protecting the dental practice and reminding the patient that recall visit or follow up appointment is important.[7]

Recall for Dental Hygienist

If the patient's recall visit is scheduled with the dental hygienist, then there should be adequate time given to accomplish the educational or technical goals. However, such procedures must take place in

the treatment room of the dentist as it is very important for him to know about the recall patient and he must attend to the patient and undergo a clinical examination. In addition, the recall card is to be checked for the recall reason of the patient and it will help in determining the specific time required for the patient's treatment by the dentist and the hygienist. [8, 9]

Recall for Dental Auxiliary

Without a dental hygienist, it is difficult to follow a good recall system, as there are many dentists who are quite reluctant to perform treatment like oral prophylaxis. However, this may lead to a haphazard clinical examination of the patient probably without an x-ray examination.

In addition, the patient is not being examined thoroughly and stains and calculus are present on their teeth which are not recorded by the dentist on the recording performed of the patient. In such cases, patient feels insecure about their dental health and assumes it to be deteriorating.

Sometimes when the auxiliary duties are expanded, then the recall visits of the patients are increased. It must be kept in mind that only recall visits at future dates must be made if the patient requires some technical assistance regarding their hygiene. However, the auxiliary must be able to carry out the health promotion with proper oral hygiene measures, correct tooth brushing techniques and motivating the patient for the maintenance of complete dental care. The dentist must do the clinical examinations and the auxiliary must be guided for recording x-rays or study models if needed. [6]

The Ideal Recall Visit

An ideal recall visit is the source of utmost satisfaction to the patient, dentist and the dental hygienist. The patient comes to the dental office when recalled, tells that the previous treatments received were fine, and has a hope of the same for the future treatments. Then the routine clinical examination is performed by the dentist. If required the patient is given instructions regarding oral hygiene and has demonstrated the correct method of tooth brushing.[1]

Success of a Recall System

The recall system success depends upon the three factors that are as follows:

- I. Dental health education
- II. Motivation
- III. Follow ups

It is the utmost responsibility of the dental team to motivate the patients and help them to understand the importance of recall visits. However, if this is achieved then it is the responsibility of the administrative assistant to maintain the recall system effectively and efficiently.

Conclusion

In a dental office setting, patients need to understand the importance of recall visits. In order to achieve this, patients must be educated and motivated for the same. There are following ways in which the recall system works: the brochures of the dental practice must be updated, newsletters, the reception room must have some audio-visual aids, bulletin boards, follow-up e-mails, before and after photographs, intraoral cameras etc.

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