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# Patient survey reveals what patients want from a dental practice

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Communicating with patients is essential for the wellbeing of dental practices, business coach and psychologist Sheila Scott advised delegates at the British Dental Conference and Exhibition today (5 June).



Ms Scott's entertaining presentation concentrated on good communication with patients, recognising it as one of the most important activities in dental practice.

"The power of patient questionnaires should not be underestimated," she said. "They can be really powerful when used to find out what patients want from the practice and their dentists. Too often they are used only to find out about what patients think about the practice."

Ms Scot who runs a consultancy service for dental practices described the types of questions that can elicit useful information and get patients to reveal more about what they want from their dentist.

From a recent survey of 1,745 patients, she identified the following attributes as the most important issues for patients:

1. trusting a dentist (90%)
2. ensuring healthy teeth and gums (77%)
3. being seen quickly/emergency care (77%)
4. sterilisation/patient protection (76%)
5. general cleanliness/hygiene
6. skills of the dentist

If the above are in place, the least important factors are:

1. convenient appointment times
2. cost
3. skills of the hygienist
4. treatments for appearance
5. being seen on time

The dental health examination is vital for the patient – and is the main reason for attending a practice in the first place. However, this activity is often viewed by the dentist as the most boring or least interesting.

Sheila Scott urges dentists to make more of the examination and to involve the patient at every stage – using language that the patient understands, not overly technical but equally avoiding being too simplistic. This helps the patient to assume responsibility for their dental health more easily.

She also pointed out the importance of discussing the cost of treatment early. Patients, she said, only get worried about how much it costs when they don't know. Once they have been advised of the cost, they can concentrate on what the treatment involves without panicking about the finances.

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