

IMPLANT PRACTICE

# SUCCESS REPORT

from Thommen Medical and Levin Group



Welcome to Issue #2 of **The Implant Practice Success Report**, a monthly newsletter on implant practice success. Levin Group and Thommen Medical are very pleased to provide business education to implant doctors and their teams. Each month The Implant Practice Success Report will feature leading-edge education for managing, marketing, and maintaining a robust and successful implant practice.

In this issue we focus on the challenge of raising patient awareness levels for implant treatment and building the best team possible in your practice.

# Are Patients Aware of Dental Implants?

By Roger P. Levin, DDS

Implant dentistry is now synonymous with a high standard of care. This is not to say that other treatment is inferior, but dental implants improve the quality of a patient's life at the very highest level. Given that implants can have such a dramatic benefit to patients, why is it that so many patients are still not referred for implant consults, surgery, or treatment? We believe that the number of implants that could be potentially referred every year is at least 30 times bigger than the number of people that are actually referred.

## Increasing Implant Awareness

Unlike 20 years ago most Americans today have familiarity with dental implants. They have read about them in magazines and now see regular television commercials touting their benefits. All this information helps people view dental implants as an optimal oral health solution. However, even today the number of people taking advantage of implants is minor compared to the potential. This is related to several factors including time and work commitments, willingness to have a surgical procedure, and, especially, cost.

The starting point in increasing the annual number of implants referred to any practice is always creating awareness, which is highly affected by repetition and reinforcement. Unfortunately, most implant surgical practices don't have sufficient, ongoing implant marketing education, or an effective annual marketing plan. Instead they rely on a few key strategies, hoping referring doctors will get the message that they should refer more implants.

When any new product or service is introduced, awareness needs to be created. Let's refer to this as the first stage of awareness. It's the stage where people need to become aware that the new product or service exists and is proven to work. Implants went through this stage 30 years ago when the efficacy, success rates, and longevity of implants were all being debated. That stage of proof has now been well validated and we are long past it.

The second stage of awareness is reinforcement and repetition. This is how awareness creates habits. For example, there are general dentists who always refer orthodontic cases and third molar removal for teenagers. However the number of general dentists that always refer patients with missing teeth for implants is small because awareness in this stage has not reached a level where it is an automatic habit.

## Repetition and Reinforcement

Awareness is based on repetition and reinforcement. Let's look at the power of advertising. For many years it was a commonly held belief in the advertising world that it took 17 impressions before a consumer decided to purchase. Consider how you view ads. When you first see one you ignore it. After the fifth time maybe you start to notice. Around the 11th or 12th time you might develop interest. And after the 17th time you might make a purchase. Simply look at Super Bowl ads and you get the message. Most of the commercials are about brands that you are very familiar with such as Budweiser or Doritos, etc. Yet they spend millions of dollars for a 30-second commercial to remind you once again that you should be drinking Budweiser and eating Doritos. Why would they do this? It's all about repetition and reinforcement. Top brand companies know that when they stop repeating and reinforcing the message that you should buy their brand, sales will go down.

Surgical practices must design an annual calendar with extensive repetition and reinforcement about dental implants that uses different strategies and angles. This includes providing patient education, reinforcement of successful cases, posting satisfied patient reviews, and repeatedly letting referring doctors know that the case went extremely well.

We will cover specific strategies for this in future newsletters of The Implant Practice Success Report. Stay tuned.

For now, be aware that awareness is critical.

# Building the Aligned Team

By Roger P. Levin, DDS

The backbone of any successful business is the team. Whether it's a business of 5 or 5,000 the culture, attitude, and performance of your team can make an enormous difference on the pathway to success. Specialty practices and dental implants require a certain team orientation that will keep the team aligned and appeal to both referring doctors and patients. We urge practice leaders to consider the following five things that they must continually do to build an aligned team.

1. Encourage the front desk team to have a "high service" attitude. This attitude needs to be shown whether a staff member is answering the phone, greeting a patient, or scheduling a patient for a next appointment. The staff should be trained that it is not the function of answering the phone or scheduling an appointment that counts. It's the personality, service attitude, and friendliness of the front staff in all situations involving patients and referring practices that will create a positive environment. Keep in mind that dental implant patients are often paying the full fee on their own and always have the option of not having dental implant treatment.
2. Make sure teamwork is of paramount importance. In most practices staff members have specialized jobs. There are individuals that handle finances, assisting, sedation, or sterilization. But the best results will be when there is teamwork. Jobs should have some level of specialization, but the practice will need team members who can pitch in when necessary with a great service attitude to enhance teamwork and performance. This is an example of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.
3. Help each team member understand their expected responsibilities and results. In many practices, team members understand the job but not the results. Excellent leaders focus on results, allowing people to do the job to the best of their ability. They don't micromanage, but rather help team members to understand the expectations and let them go to work. If a team member is not meeting expectations you shouldn't panic. This is actually an excellent opportunity to teach and counsel that team member until their performance creates the right result. It's also an excellent way to determine whether a team member is the right fit for a particular job. Don't forget that it's also important to provide recognition, appreciation, and positive feedback when team members do achieve results. This helps to motivate team members and encourage a team oriented mentality.
4. Watch the energy curve of each team member. Jack Welch, the brilliant former CEO of General Electric, talked about the energy curve of employees at different times. Although long-term team members are overwhelmingly great contributors, there are occasionally times when a staff member may be on the declining end of an energy curve. Practices have been experiencing this more than ever as the COVID-19 crisis has taken over the nation and created problems that did not exist before. Certainly, compassion and working with a team member to bring them back to full capability is an excellent first step, but there may come a time for certain team members when their energy no longer matches the job. Unfortunately, when that happens it's often detrimental in terms of service mentality, teamwork, and interpersonal relations.
5. Continually work to inspire the team. Inspiration can come in many ways. It could be a compliment to a team member for doing a good job, talking positively about the team member while they're in front of a patient, sharing an inspiring story, or giving out coffee gift certificates for no reason. As long as you stay focused on ways to uplift staff members, you have added a fantastic skill to your leadership toolkit. The main reason this doesn't happen is because practice leaders are so focused on patient care, they forget to focus on the people who are around them every day.

## Building the Aligned Team

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If you want to build an aligned team that works as a group to achieve specific goals, then the above recommendations will be helpful. Everyone wants to work in a positive, uplifting environment where they are appreciated. They also want to know what is expected and to be given help and support when they need it. If their environment isn't positive and enjoyable,

they will resent it and that resentment will spill over to referring practices and patients. The best thing you can do to improve customer service toward a five-star level is to create a positive culture with regular appreciation, recognition, and inspiration. This is how great leaders and great specialty practices develop an aligned team.

### **ROGER P. LEVIN, DDS**

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