



Implant Game Changers

A Whitepaper Series By Roger P. Levin, DDS

Implant Game Changers is a monthly whitepaper on an important implant practice management topic. It provides you with a quick and easy way to understand a specific business challenge and how to translate the solution into higher production and profit, greater efficiency, more implant patients, lower stress and greater personal satisfaction.

Have Implants Become Boring?

Dental implants have been an excellent service for patients for approximately 35 years. Early in the stages of implant dentistry there was a lot of confusion, rapid development of new implants and implant techniques, and trial and error. Today, dental implants are viewed to as a “mature” service. They are a standard form of care for many patients and an opportunity to improve the quality of their lives. However, there are still millions of partially or fully edentulous patients that either have no replacement for a tooth or a replacement that is inferior to dental implants. This means that the opportunity and potential to increase the number of dental implants placed is significant. So, you might ask: Why aren't more implants being placed each year? Or perhaps your question should really be: Have dental implants become boring?

The First Stage of a New Service

When dental implants emerged in the early to mid-1980's, they were one of the most fascinating and talked about new services in dentistry. Why? Because they solved a problem that had not been properly solved in the past and represented a higher quality of treatment for many patients. It seemed that every week, new information, research, products and ancillary products related to implant dentistry emerged. Implant procedure courses were available all over the United States and worldwide and dentists rushed to learn more about this service.

Whenever a new product or service is introduced it goes through an adoption period. In this case, part of the adoption of dental implants can be credited to dental specialists who recognized their potential benefits and worked with companies and others to provide widespread education. There was a clear understanding by general dentists, who represent powerful referral sources to dental specialty practices, of the value of implants. Further, dentists knew if they became comfortable restoring implant cases, referrals would

increase. This is what I call a triple win because the specialist, restorative practice, and patient will benefit. There's not much better than a triple win.

Throughout the 1990's dental implants continued to increase in the number of treatments, component parts, bone and augmentation procedures, and new research. Gradually, many practices became more comfortable with dental implants and referrals steadily increased. This led to the 2000's, when dental implants became mainstream. Most dentists were able to restore basic or more complex cases.

All of this led to continual growth in dental implants until the Great Recession (2008 and 2009). Like any economic challenge this caused a reset for the growth of dental implants, but they continued to grow. Once the recession abated, the growth of annual dental implant placements took off again and continued right into and through the pandemic. If we eliminate the shutdown phase of the pandemic, the number of dental implants placed in 2020 and early 2021 remained very strong. I believe dental implants will continue to grow, but they are still well below their potential.

So, what is the real reason that dental implants are not closer to reaching their potential? We certainly see that most dental patients who visit an office accept basic dental treatment if a need is identified. Cavities, crowns, bridges, root canals, and periodontal therapy are all accepted when necessary by most patients. Dental insurance is a contributing factor, but patients who visit dental practices now tend to have a higher “dental IQ” and appreciate the benefits of good oral health. However, this attitude does not seem to hold true for dental implants. In our experience at Levin Group, approximately 35% of patients who are referred to an implant practice for surgical consultation never make the appointment. (By the way, if the general practice calls and makes the appointment for the patient, approximately 95% will go.)

Have Implants Become Boring?

Okay, I'll admit it. I selected the title for this white paper to get your attention. Are implants boring? Well, understanding how implants work, what they're made of, how they are placed, and how they are restored is, for most patients, relatively boring. But that is not what I am referencing. What I am wondering is have dental implants as a mature service become boring. Is the glitz gone? Is there any status to having dental implants today? The public is certainly more aware of dental implants, but do they know how dental implants can improve their quality of life, smile, satisfaction and happiness?

Like any product or service, it is the newer ones that tend to get the all the attention. There was a new cosmetic product recently launched and one of the first webinars to feature this product attracted over 4,500 dental professionals including 1,000 dentists. Dentists and team members flocked to the webinar to learn more about this breakthrough new product that was in the cosmetic family. I have not heard about an implant seminar or webinar lately that has attracted 4,500 dental professionals. And this makes sense. Unless there is some radical new breakthrough that makes implant treatment easier, faster, less expensive or significantly higher quality, people won't be falling over themselves to hear about them. So, is this the fate of dental implants? They'll continue to grow a bit each year, but the real potential will not be accessed anytime soon.

Bring Back the Excitement One Practice at a Time

The answer is that perhaps as a mature service, dental implants are less "glitzy". However, it doesn't have to be that way in your individual practice. We are familiar with many practices that are placing and restoring very high numbers of implants. They keep implant dentistry at an exciting level. They educate their patients or referring doctors, keep everyone around them up to date, and they look for new opportunities to offer dental implants to any patient that is a candidate (which generally means any patient who is missing a tooth.)

There is no question that when a practice becomes excited about a service, more of that service takes place. Whether it's a breakthrough in restorative dentistry, cosmetic dentistry, or implants, creating an exciting focus on that service will make a huge difference. So how do you make a dental service exciting?

4 Steps for Bringing Back the Excitement

If you're ready to bring back the excitement, there are certain steps you can take. These include:

1. Develop a communications program with referring doctors. Keep the information short and to the point, but be sure to bring referring doctors new ideas, new insights, new updates, and well... new everything. Developing a communications program where you're sharing with them either in one-on-one meetings, group meetings, virtual platforms, or email can be a very positive step in generating some excitement around new developments in implant dentistry.
2. Communicate with referring doctors after each implant case. Since implants have become more standard and routine, it's simply assumed that if the restorative doctor is capable of finishing the case there's no need for personal communication. While that may be true, what is missing is the opportunity to bring additional messages and information. It may have been a routine case but having a conversation can open the door to additional discussion about other types of cases, new advances in implant dentistry, new ways to place or restore implants, and even resource information if the referring doctor has any general questions.
3. Communicate quality-of-life benefits to every implant consult patient. Not only will this increase case acceptance, but it will also have the patient talking to the referring doctor at a different level when they return for the restorative phase of implant treatment. Patients can be excellent conduits of information and when they are excited, referring doctors will be excited as well.

4. Make sure referring doctors know that you will support them. There are still many general dentists who aren't comfortable restoring simple implant cases. When general dentists aren't comfortable, they aren't excited and don't tend to refer many cases. If they feel there's a partnership and safety net when it comes to implant dentistry, they are much more likely to take the step of referring a patient even if they aren't 100% comfortable with the restorative aspect of the case. One of the best opportunities to support referring doctors is through the implant representative. These are highly trained professionals that can often help restorative doctors through the planning and restorative phase of an implant case and add to their level of comfort and capability.

Summary

Implant dentistry is now a mature service, and despite all its wonderful benefits and advances, as with any mature service or product it begins to lose its excitement. It's up to each individual specialty practice to bring back the excitement and communicate it to referring doctors. Excitement can be focused on communicating what is new, using all opportunities to update referring doctors, sending highly satisfied patients back following the implant surgical phase, and providing support when necessary to help referring doctors through the restorative phase.

Dental implants are one of the best ways to improve a patient's quality of life. This should become an ongoing conversation between specialty practices and referring doctors. What is old can become new again...if you bring back the excitement.

ROGER P. LEVIN, DDS

Roger P. Levin, DDS is the CEO and Founder of Levin Group, a leading practice management consulting firm that has worked with over 30,000 practices to increase production. A recognized expert on dental practice management and marketing, he has written 67 books and over 4,000 articles and regularly presents seminars in the U.S. and around the world.

To contact Dr. Levin or to join the 40,000 dental professionals who receive his *Practice Production Tip of the Day*, visit www.levingroup.com or email rlevin@levingroup.com.