

Communicating with patients – tips and tricks

Equipping patients with the skills to improve their oral care regime can feel difficult to achieve within the time limits of a routine check-up, but a simple four step communication technique can help you provide information in an effective and memorable way:

1. Provision of information

There is evidence that patients do not recall as much advice as dentists believe they have discussed.¹ To help retention of information, try the following:

- ❖ Communicate the most important points first (known as the 'primary effect' technique) to increase recall of information by up to 36%.
- ❖ Emphasising which information is most important to increase recall by 13%.
- ❖ Mirroring the vocabulary used by the patient can also improve recall by 13%.

2. Motivating the patient

Positive messages identifying the benefits of change are effective.² Ideally the benefits identified should be those that are valued by the individual patient. Individuals who believe that they have the ability to take care of their oral health also generally have better oral health³, so it's important to frame guidance positively.

- ❖ Encourage small goals that accumulate into bigger goals. The experience of success with small goals can feed into a belief in the ability to change.
- ❖ Provide models of change with examples of patients who overcame similar obstacles.
- ❖ Acknowledge that anxiety can be a normal part of the change process.



1. Misra S, Daly B, Dunne S, Millar B, Packer M, Asimakopoulou K. What do patients and dentists remember following a consultation? An exploratory study. *Patient Preference and Adherence* 2013; 7: 543-549.
 2. Asimakopoulou K, Newton JT, Daly B, Kutzer Y & Ide M. The effects of providing periodontal disease risk information on psychological outcomes- a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Clinical Periodontology*, 2015; 42: 350-355.
 3. Syrjälä AMH, Knecht MC, Knuuttila MLE. Dental self-efficacy as a determinant to oral health behaviour, oral hygiene and HbA1c level among diabetic patients. *Journal of Clinical Periodontology*, 1998; 26: 616-621.w



3. Volition: putting motivation into action

Motivation alone is not sufficient to create behaviour change; strategies are needed to help transform desire into action.

- ♥ Encourage patients to make a specific plan of where, when and how the particular behaviour should occur, e.g. “flossing” as the behaviour, a suitable situation could be “in the bathroom after brushing my teeth every night”.
- ♥ Alternatively the patient could be encouraged to associate flossing with a commonly occurring behaviour, e.g. “floss after you have washed you hair”.

4. Forming a habit

The overall goal should be for advice given to patients to become incorporated into their daily routines. The greater the repetition of a behaviour, the more likely it is that the behaviour becomes habitual. To help patients form new habits:

- ♥ Provide guidance on the behaviour to be addressed in a structured manner, emphasising the importance of the information.
- ♥ Plan when, where and how they will try the new behaviour.
- ♥ Encourage the patient to record how well they do.

