The practice within a practice

By Roger P. Levin, DDS

What would you say if someone asked you to run two dental practices? Guess what? You already do! Essentially, implant dentistry is an entirely separate practice within your practice.

Once you realize that, you are on your way to greater implant success—even in a turbulent economy.

What makes implants different?

Your two “practices” are vastly different. One is a business with need-based procedures and dental insurance, while the other is a business that deals with fee-for-service elective procedures.

The implant segment of your practice requires different protocols and systems for the following areas:

• Communication. Implant treatment involves a high level of collaboration between the restorative and surgical practices. This level of communication is one of the reasons Levin Group recommends that surgical practices hire an implant treatment coordinator (ITC). This individual acts as a point person, guiding patients through the implant process and coordinating communication with restorative practices. In addition, the ITC works with the implant sales representative to ensure that the practices have the proper supplies, including component parts.

• Patient decision-making. The implant patient has different motivations than most other dental patients. Dental patients generally accept basic treatment on broken or decayed teeth. On the other hand, implants are a completely elective service that no one has to buy. Most dental patients who lose teeth will seek treatment, yet the majority will opt for more traditional services...unless practices have the right implant systems in place.

• Case presentation issues. Many clinicians choose patients based on initial interest in implants. This preselection severely limits the potential pool of implant patients. Levin Group recommends that every partially or fully edentulous patient be educated on the benefits of implants. In fact, all patients, even if not missing any teeth, should be made aware of implants.

Most patients do not immediately think of implants as the treatment of choice for missing teeth until practices build value for this treatment option. Implants are an emotional choice for patients, and the case presentation needs to be tailored accordingly.

Emphasizing the enhanced quality of life implants deliver is one benefit that resonates with patients, especially in today’s economy.

How can I grow my implant practice?

If you are committed to growing the implant segment of your practice, Levin Group recommends these four action steps:

1) Improve collaboration with your referring doctors.

Co-education involves the implant surgeons stepping into the educational process and providing case-specific information and guidance to those restorative doctors who can benefit from this added level of collaboration. The goal of co-education is to make it possible for the restoring dentist to gradually transition into more complex implant restorations.

2) Ramp up patient education.

Most patients are not fully aware of the numerous benefits of implants. Surgical and restorative practices should actively educate patients. As with any other patient communication, conversations about implants should be scripted to deliver concise, clear and consistent messages. Use supporting educational materials, such as brochures, to reinforce what has been discussed about implants. Patient testimonials as well as “before and after” photos are very powerful, particularly with unfamiliar procedures such as implants.

3) Enhance communication with patients.

Powerful verbal skills help define team effectiveness, practice efficiency and quality of care. Scripting is the logical way to foster and reinforce consistent, effective communication with your implant patients. This results in a higher level of customer service, increased case acceptance and improved patient satisfaction. In addition, when team members know what to do and know what to say, practice stress is greatly reduced.

4) Offer flexible financial options.

You don’t want to see motivated patients suddenly become “unmotivated” when they discover the cost of implant treatment. The current economy makes this an even more important issue. Fortunately, third-party financing is a smart solution for patients and practices alike.

Even though they often have third-party patient financing as an option, many doctors have mixed feelings about it because they are hesitant to give up a very small portion of the fee as part of the financing arrangement. Levin Group has been reminding clients for years that the small portion of the fee retained by the patient financing company is insignificant compared with the return to the practice in higher case acceptance rates and overall production.

Conclusion

Implants can be an important growth center for practices with the right attitude and knowledge to make it happen. Taking a “practice-within-a-practice” approach is the best strategy for increasing implant production in both surgical and restorative practices. This concept provides the correct framework for achieving ultimate implant success.

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About the author

Dr. Roger P. Levin is founder and chief executive officer of Levin Group, Inc., the leading implant practice management firm. Levin Group provides Total Implant Success, the premier comprehensive consulting solution for lifetime success to implant doctors in the United States and around the world. For more than two decades, Dr. Levin and Levin Group have been dedicated to improving the lives of implant doctors.

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