

***Great Answers
to Tough Patient Questions***

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***Robin Wright, PhD
Wright Communications
2410 Thayer Street
Evanston, IL 60201
Voice: 847-864-5266
FAX: 847-864-5276
Web site: <http://www.greatanswers.com>
E-mail: robin@greatanswers.com***

Great Answers to Tough Patient Questions

About the Course

Patients ask: “Why did my insurance company say you are too expensive?” “Why fill baby teeth when they fall out anyway?” “You won’t see me just because I’m late?” “Can I put this treatment off until next year?” Get great answers to 25 of the most difficult questions in dentistry. Learn to turn challenging conversations into a chance to solve patient problems in less time, convince patients to accept treatment, speak persuasively about financial arrangements, increase referrals, and reap the benefits of patient satisfaction. This true-to-life seminar is based upon research and interviews with dental teams across the U.S. It features patient issues that bug dental offices most, critiques the answers practices are giving now, and presents strategies that you can adapt to your personal style. An interactive seminar for the entire dental team.

About the Speaker

Robin Wright, PhD has an international reputation as a dental communication specialist. She has presented over five hundred seminars, including the Yankee, the Hinman, the Chicago Midwinter, the ADA Annual Session, and the AAPD Annual Meeting. She is a featured speaker in the ADA’s seminar series. Her combination of humor, enthusiasm and expertise make her a powerful speaker.

Robin holds a doctorate in healthcare communication from Northwestern University and a master's degree in communication from the University of Illinois at Urbana. She has taught communication courses at four universities.

The author of over fifty publications, Dr. Wright's work has appeared in the *Journal of the American Dental Association*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. She is the author of the 1997 book *Tough Questions, Great Answers: Responding to Patient Concerns about Today's Dentistry* through Quintessence Publishing. Robin is President of Wright Communications and lives in Evanston, Illinois.

Introduction

Seven Essential Truths of Difficult Questions

1. The 90/10 Rule applies
2. More patients are bothered than you think
3. Questions and complaints are good
4. You know the answers
5. Your talk counts more than your treatment
6. Finesse only takes you so far
7. Emotional support works better than you know it should

Research Summary of Patient Concerns

Treatment	47%
Finance	29%
Reception	24%

Reception Concern Categories

Appointment Promptness
Parents and Children
Appointment Times
Appointment Delays
Health and Dental History Forms
Late Patients
Appointment Refusal/Cancellation
Dentist Competence
Appointment Knowledge
Questionable Emergencies

Treatment Concern Categories

Treatment Suitability
Treatment Need/Diagnostic Accuracy
Fear/Pain
Treatment Safety
Treatment Quality
Treatment Understanding
Relationships
Colleague Evaluations
Treatment Immediacy/Severity

Finance Concern Categories

Dental Benefit Coverage
Fee Comparisons
Payment Procedures
Managed Care Plans
Specific Treatment Fees
General Fee Amounts

Smart Strategies for Tough Questions

- Get privacy
- Listen well and longer than you want to
- Stay calm
- Don't sweep concerns under the rug
- Don't get snotty, even when they deserve it
- Take the patient's point of view (paraphrase and acknowledge)
- Begin with an area of agreement
- Give a quick solution if there is one
- Ignore unfair criticism
- Don't tell too much
- Add a compliment if you can
- Keep them posted on your progress and the outcome

Patient Questions in Reception

Please assess the following possible answers to patient questions in reception. Which do you like (or HATE) and why?

Why don't you have an opening sooner than that (or at the time I prefer)?

It is certainly frustrating when the times you want are already taken. Let's schedule you so you have an appointed time. And I'll put you on our special call list if an earlier appointment opens up.

I don't know when a good appointment time would be. Can't I just call you?

Certainly, but the times you prefer do book up fairly quickly.

I'm in pain and need to see the doctor right away. No, noon isn't good. No, 4 isn't either.

I'm sorry, but noon and 4 p.m. are our only times available. I urge you to pick one. We would hate to see you even more uncomfortable tonight. But I'm sure you will make the right decision. Do you prefer one of those times, or shall I check on available times for tomorrow?

Why are you running behind?

The doctor is tied up with a difficult case and will be with you shortly.

Sorry I'm late. You can still see me, right?

We cannot inconvenience our next patient and encroach on their time.

Is the doctor any good?

Yes! The best! That's why I love working here.

Why don't you let parents in the treatment room?

Children behave best in the absence of their parents when there is a need for their total attention.

I'm dropping Johnny off and I'll be back later.

Our office policy is to ask the parent to stay in the office during the appointment in case the child needs a change in treatment. I stay when my children are being treated, figuring it's better to be here and not be needed than to be needed and not be here.

Promoting Treatment Acceptance

Supporting Treatment Recommendations

- Begin with an outline
- Appeal to patient values and priorities
- Find a compliment
- Don't refer to teeth by numbers
- Don't tell them what the doctor would "like" to do
- Use more patient examples
- Use appropriate humor
- Watch your delivery when discussing treatment alternatives
- Compare the treatment to alternatives in terms of advantages and disadvantages
- Appeal to benefits

Benefit Choices

- Dental benefits
- Health and lifestyle benefits

Treatment Benefit Cheat Sheet

<p><i>Dental Amalgam Restoration</i></p> <p>Supports and protects the tooth Protects from future discomfort and infection Affordable Durable and long-lasting</p>	<p><i>Composite Resin Restoration</i></p> <p>Looks very natural; virtually invisible Supports and protects the tooth Protects from future discomfort and infection Preserves tooth structure</p>
<p><i>Bleaching and Whitening</i></p> <p>Improved appearance for clients, family More self-confidence Gives back the brightness of your smile Affordable Easily maintained</p>	<p><i>Sealants</i></p> <p>Protects teeth most at risk for decay Saves dental costs in the near and far future Better dental health in adulthood Comfortable procedure Guaranteed if child has regular visits</p>
<p><i>Inlays</i></p> <p>Looks very natural; virtually invisible Supports and protects the tooth Protects from future discomfort and infection Preserves tooth structure Durable and long-lasting</p>	<p><i>Laminate Veneers</i></p> <p>Improved appearance for clients, family More self-confidence Create a desired tooth shape or close a space Look great at your high school reunion Impress your friends</p>
<p><i>Bonding</i></p> <p>Quick and comfortable procedure Change the shape or color of your teeth Improved appearance for clients, family More self-confidence Looks and feels very natural</p>	<p><i>Crowns</i></p> <p>Durable and long-lasting Supports and protects the tooth Looks and feels very natural Protects from future discomfort and infection Improved appearance for clients, family More self-confidence</p>
<p><i>Fixed Bridge</i></p> <p>More comfortable when you eat, speak and smile Better function when you speak and chew More stable, not wobbly Feels light, not heavy Food doesn't get caught</p>	<p><i>Esthetic Partial</i></p> <p>Less noticeable than ever before Looks and feels more natural Comfortable procedure Improved appearance for clients, family Easier to eat, speak and chew</p>
<p><i>Periodontal Care</i></p> <p>Keep your teeth a lifetime Protection from future discomfort and infection More affordable dental care Fresher breath Improved appearance for clients, family</p>	

Patient Questions about Treatment

Treatment Suitability

Would you have this treatment if you were me?

You know, I could just get this tooth pulled. That would be cheaper than a crown, right?

Treatment Need/Diagnostic Accuracy

My sister told me she read in a magazine that there are other ways to treat this.

Do I really need the treatment the doctor recommended?

Why fill baby teeth when they fall out anyway?

Fear/Pain

I'm worried it's going to really hurt.

Treatment Safety

I don't want any x-rays. I've had too many in my life already.

Treatment Quality

Do you guarantee your work?

Is the doctor any good? (particular procedure)

Managing Effective Financial Discussions

<i>Two Difficult Issues in Fee Discussions</i>	
Cost fairness	Is this office honest in setting fees? Could I buy the same service from another dentist for less?
Treatment value	Is the treatment worth the price? Will I get something I need or want for my money?

Communication Outline for Business Managers

- Review the written treatment plan
- Review the financial policies of the practice
- Document the discussion

Sample Financial Policy Statements

Financial Arrangements

- We expect payment from our new patients at the time of the visit, regardless of dental benefits coverage. We accept cash, checks, and credit cards.
- You have the most important role in controlling your dental care costs. If you practice prevention, you will gain the benefits of good oral health and smaller dental bills.
- Payment in full at the start of treatment with cash or a check earns a complimentary discount of five percent.
- This practice accepts the following two major credit cards:
- Patients may prefer to make arrangements with a bank or credit union for the amount of the treatment, making monthly payments to the lending institution.
- For our patients without dental insurance, we require 50 percent of the total fee at the start of treatment. The balance will be due at on a 60-day payment schedule.
- Finance charges are added to accounts every 30 days at 1.5 percent of the unpaid balance.

Dental Benefit Plans

- We promise to base your treatment on your dental needs, not your insurance policy.
- Although you have insurance coverage, some procedures may not be covered. A deductible or a co-payment may be required. Our business manager will be happy to review your dental benefits coverage with you.
- For our patients with insurance, we will be pleased to assist in filing a pre-determination with the dental insurance company. Payment of the deductible and 50 percent of the co-payment is required at the start of treatment. Any balance will be due on completion of the treatment.
- Your level of insurance coverage is determined by the policy your employer selects. If you think your coverage is insufficient, you may wish to address this with your employer.
- You are the most important person regarding your health. After consulting with us, you ultimately decide whether a treatment is right for you. Therefore, you are responsible for payment regardless of insurance coverage.

Patient Questions about Finances

General Fee Amounts

How do you set your fees?

I saw the doctor's new car. The office must be doing really well.

Fee Comparisons

I bet I could find it cheaper elsewhere.

I'm calling around for prices. How much is a filling?

Payment Procedures

Please bill my child's jerk of a father for the treatment. (divorced mother)

Thirty years ago a filling cost one-third that much.

Dental Benefit Coverage

I have insurance. Why do I have a bill?

I really like it here, but I'll get a discount if I switch to a dentist on this list.

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