

Patient Phone Calls

Standard Telephone Greetings and Scripts

- Smile each time you answer the phone. That simple act actually puts a pleasant, friendly and helpful tone in your voice. Always think of the person on the phone at the time as the most important person you will speak to that day.
- Always remember that your telephone style projects an image of the practice and can influence whether or not a prospective patient decides to become part of your practice.
- Make sure every caller feels valued and welcomed, whether they are a longtime patient, a prospective patient looking for a new dentist, or even a vendor or sales rep. Remember, new patient referrals can come from anywhere.
- Speak slowly, enunciate clearly.
- Always be calm, professional, respectful and project genuine concern. Concentrate on what the caller says, listen attentively without interrupting, confirm the situation (especially if it's an emergency), evaluate the urgency, and pass the information on with complete accuracy.
- Practice, or adapt, scripts so they sound natural and not forced or like you're reading from a page.
- Remember that no one likes to be put on hold, so do that only when absolutely necessary.
- If it's an emergency, try to make an appointment for the same day, regardless of whether the caller is a patient of record. A helpful, empathetic approach and a successful outcome can convert an emergency appointment into a long-term patient. If it's not possible to schedule the patient for the same day, explain the situation and refer the caller to a trusted colleague who is able to see the patient that day, or (if that is not available), suggest where the patient might be seen sooner.

Sample Phone Scripts

Use this language for all calls:

- Front Desk Staff: "Good (morning/afternoon). Thank you for calling (practice name). This is (greeter's name). How may I (we) help you?"

The caller's response will determine what you say next.

Use this language for new, prospective patients:

- Front Desk Staff: "We appreciate your interest in our practice. How can we help you?"

Use this language if the patient needs immediate or emergency treatment:

- Front Desk Staff: "I'm sorry that you're in pain. Let me see how soon Dr. (insert name) can see you. We'll do our best to get you in as soon as possible."

Use this language if the patient is a "telephone shopper":

- Front Desk Staff: "Are you able to schedule a visit to our office? We'd like to show you the facilities and introduce you to the staff and the doctor(s). We can answer any questions you might have at that time. If you'd like, we can even schedule an initial appointment at the same time so the doctor can assess your needs and determine the best treatment for you."

Use this language if the caller asks about the dentist's participation in a specific dental benefits plan:

- Front Desk Staff: "Good morning, thank you for calling (practice name), Jane speaking. How may I help you today?"
- Patient: "Do you accept my (name of dental benefits plan)?"
- Front Desk Staff: "I would be happy to assist you. May I ask your name?"
- Patient: "Ms. Doe."

If you do not participate in the plan:

- Front Desk Staff: "Thank you, Ms. Doe. Dr. Cook and her team are wonderful. [If the practice has patients with the particular plan, add] Several of Dr. Cook's patients have the same dental benefits plan as you. We are not a preferred provider with your plan but we will assist you in maximizing your dental benefit reimbursement. May I schedule an appointment for you?"

If you are a participating provider:

- Front Desk Staff: "Thank you, Ms. Doe, Dr. Cook and her team are wonderful. We are a preferred provider with your plan and will assist you in maximizing your dental benefit reimbursement. [If the practice has patients with the particular plan, add] We have several patients with your plan who see Dr. Cook. May I schedule an appointment for you?"

Use this language if the caller asks about fees for a cleaning:

- Patient: "How much do you charge for a cleaning?"
- Front Desk Staff: "I would be happy to answer your question. My name is Jane. May I have your name please?"
- Patient: "Ms. Doe."

- Front Desk Staff: "We have different types of cleaning in our office, depending on your oral health needs. The fees range from \$_____ to \$_____. We would like to invite you to come in and meet Dr. Cook so she can examine your mouth and determine what type of cleaning is best for you."

Use this language if the caller asks about fees for a crown:

- Patient: "Hello, how much do you charge for a crown?"
- Front Desk Staff: "Good morning, thank you for calling (practice name). My name is Jane. May I have your name please?"
- Patient: "This is Ms. Doe."
- Front Desk Staff: "The fee for a crown will vary from \$_____ to \$_____ based on your specific needs and the materials used. We understand that many patients are concerned about cost. May I schedule a consultation for you to meet Dr Cook, have her examine you and take any necessary X-rays? Then we can provide you with a specific fee for your treatment. We are happy to do this at no charge! When would you like to come in? I can fit you in today at _____."

Use this language if the caller asks about fees for an implant:

Patient: "How much do you charge for an implant?"

Front Desk Staff: "I would be happy to discuss the fees for an implant. My name is Jane. May I have your name?"

Patient: "Ms. Doe,"

Front Desk Staff: "Thank you, Ms. Doe. The fee for an implant will vary from \$_____ to \$_____ based on your specific needs and the materials used. We understand that many patients are concerned about cost. May I schedule a consultation for you to meet Dr Cook and have her examine you and take any necessary X-rays? Once we have that information, we can provide you with a specific fee for your treatment. We are happy to do this at no charge! When would you like to come in? I can fit you in today at _____."

Use this language if the caller expresses concern about fees:

- Patient: "The fees are so high."
- Front Desk Staff: "Thank you for sharing your feelings. In (practice name), we are proud to provide the best dental care we possibly can. The fees are based on the materials used, the time, skill and advanced technology used to provide you with the level of care you expect from Dr. Cook and her staff and high level of training and education they have."

Or

- Front Desk Staff: "Dental treatment is an investment in your health. Perhaps I can assist you. We have several payment options available; may I review them with you to see which would works best for you?"

Or

- Front Desk Staff: "Is it possible for you to stop in today or one day this week? We'd like to schedule an initial appointment so the doctor can assess your oral health needs and develop a customized treatment plan that fits your specific needs. We can discuss treatment costs once we know what your needs are. At the same time, we can review ways for you to fit the treatment you need in your budget. In the meantime, do you have any questions about the practice that I can answer **briefly** over the phone?"

Use this language to schedule appointments for patients of record:

Patient: "Good morning, Susie. It's Ms. Doe. I'd like to schedule an appointment."

- Front Desk Staff: "Hello, Ms. Doe. How are you? How can I help you today?"
 - For longstanding patients who honor regular appointments, respond to their request for an appointment with "Let me try to get you in as soon as possible." And work to get them into the practice as soon as the schedule allows.
 - For patients of record who frequently cancel or miss appointments, respond with "I will try to get you in as soon as possible. The next available opening is (insert a date and time convenient to the office). Are you available then?" Once they're scheduled, respond with "We'll contact you with a reminder of the appointment (insert timeframe). We look forward to seeing you."

Use this language to end all calls:

- Front Desk Staff: "Thank you for calling us today, (insert name). We'll see you (restate appointment date and time and the reason for the appointment). Have a great day!"