

Patient Retention Considerations

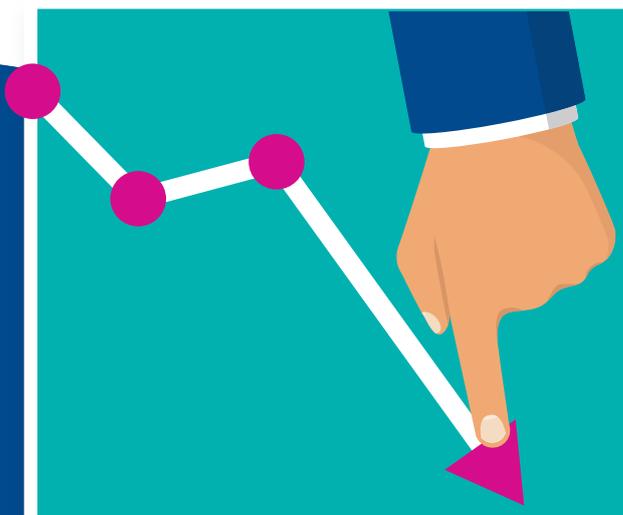
We are clearly experiencing a worrying, stressful and uncertain time and nobody knows when things may even start to resemble what we consider to be normal.

Your patients may have lost their jobs, be on a limited budget or worried about their future income. Even the most loyal plan patients may be considering their plan in light of that uncertainty.

To help with that, we are providing you with some ideas on how you can discuss the benefits of remaining on a plan with your patients, to help them make an informed decision.

Your plan income is crucial to ensure the practice is available to support patients, both remotely for now and operationally once you are able to offer a full service again.

As you know, it is important to communicate clearly and regularly with your patients to reassure them that you are still available for them.



Is the patient's current plan fit for purpose?

You may decide to offer a lower-priced plan for a limited period. Whilst patients are unable to attend the practice, the plan would still allow access to the Global Dental Scheme, which offers support in the event of dental trauma, redundancy and / or emergency treatment (please refer to your handbook for more details). You may also want to include another tangible benefit, e.g. an oral health care pack, a discount voucher for sundries etc.

Incentives

To show your gratitude to any patient deciding to stay on their current plan, again you could offer an incentive such as an oral health care pack, a visit with the oral health educator (when normal service resumes), a voucher for a discount on an electric toothbrush, etc. The value of this incentive could be reduced pro rata for those patients opting to move to a cheaper plan. (NB when offering incentives, do always bear in mind GDC requirements.)



Understanding the plan

Payment plans are calculated and priced dependent upon patient need over a 12-month period. Some patients will have accessed your services already this year and some will not be due to see you for a few months. We do not know when your practice will be open again for routine care, so this may affect more patients as time goes on.

Undertake a cost analysis for your patients. Compare the cost of treatment they have had over the last year or so against what they would have paid on a 'private fee per item' basis. If your plan has been priced correctly, patients would have paid more and lost out on the other plan benefits.

If the patient does cancel their plan now, they may have to pay a registration fee of £8 when they re-join and will lose the Global Assistance Benefit.



Triaging when the practice reopens

Some of your patients will have been in the middle of treatment that you are now unable to complete. Reassure these patients that they will have priority once the practice is open again. If you worked 4 days a week, you may want to extend that to 5 or 6 days or start and finish an hour earlier and later to free up clinical time. For those patients waiting, you could also introduce a traffic light system – grade patients' needs: red for urgent, amber for moderate and green for low need. This will help your team, when the time comes, to allocate appointments. Manage your appointment book by blocking out 'plan' time to accommodate your patients who have committed to the practice by remaining on their plan.

Customer Service

Your patients, like all of us, are having to deal with a huge amount of stress and unprecedented pressures. Help them by taking time out to call, email and text for the following reasons:

- Follow up on a recent course of treatment – how are they? Are they happy and comfortable following the procedure / treatment?
- Elderly / vulnerable patients – a friendly voice can really help people who may have to self-isolate. Are they well and have everything they need?
- Use your social media and website to give oral health and nutrition advice. Also add pictures of you and your team in a home working environment to keep the relationship current
- Send a text to those patients celebrating a significant birthday / event. If you have access to your practice data, you can pull a report giving you this information.