

LAUNCHING BACK INTO PRACTICE STRONG

In Every Crisis Lies an Opportunity



By **Kim McGuire, CPCC**



"Unprecedented," "New Normal," "Uncertain." These are the overused phrases and words describing this time. Certainly you and your business have been through a lot the last few months: applying for a PPP loan, working with creditors to delay payments, procuring Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and keeping your team apprised on the new systems when returning back to work. As an Executive Coach, my focus has been to coach clients to not only come back to work successfully, but to up their game and thrive in this new environment. My hope is that you take some of these ideas and implement them so you can serve your patients, strengthen your team culture and actually increase your profitability.

Throughout this process we have reminded dentists that they wear three hats as an owner: a Leader, a CEO and a Clinical Director. As the CEO, you have been busy obtaining your PPP loan, temporarily laying off some or all of your team and focusing on cash flow analysis. As a Clinical Director, you have procured your PPE, created new protocols and outfitted your practice to comply with the current standards. Now, let's move into what will sustain you long term, as the leader.

Leadership is about influencing those around you - your patients, your team and your community. Patient relationships and engagement are not new, yet effort will have to be significantly increased to not only survive but thrive in this environment.

Right now, there are headlines in the media that are not always positive for the dental industry. Rather than trying to control the media, focus on what you can control - the narrative inside your practice. What are the communications and messages that you send to your patients and community? You have an opportunity to strengthen your relationship and the trust they have in you

as a healthcare provider - encouraging your patients to take care of their oral health as it is connected to the rest of their body.

While we don't have a crystal ball, there may be a "gap" in the patients who are ready to come back to see you. The "early adopters," those who trust you and were ready to see you once you opened your practice, have already been in for their appointments. The next phase of patients to come back are the "early and late majority" (up to 70% of your patient base). These patients may be more hesitant and will require more engagement to get them back to your practice. What we do today can greatly reduce the effect of that gap.

Before we get into some tactical strategies on increasing patient engagement, let us focus on leadership. It starts with a "Culture Calibration." Calibrating one's culture means to have everyone aligned in the result and the actions taken to achieve the ideal outcome. Once there is consistency in your culture and everyone is clear on the expectations of each other, they can begin to focus on the desired results from every interaction. If every employee understands that each interaction with patients either encouraged them to come in and experience the office influences them to reschedule their appointment, we would see an increased level of importance and concentration on each interaction. Our conversations matter, our word choice is essential and their experience matters.

What is the consistent message you want your patients to feel when they engage with your office? Whether it's calling the office and speaking to someone over the phone, visiting your website or social media channels or coming in and interacting with your team, what should a patient feel? In a time like this, you want to focus on words like trust, safety, reassurance, confidence, knowledgeable, etc.

In your team meeting, gather the team and ask them two questions:

- 1) What do we want our patients to feel?
- 2) How will we ensure they feel that?

Once you have your Culture in place, focus on the different ways you will engage your patients. For a detailed guide with scripting for all modalities listed, see the link at the end of this article to download.

The most obvious one would be the telephone. Do you have a script for pre-screening your patients before they come in? It is important to communicate to the patients all of the protocols the office follows to keep the team and the patients safe and healthy. Whoever is making the phone calls should also reassure all patients that the dental office is making every effort to be safe and you have been diligent about infection control for decades. In addition, a post-appointment check in is a great time to ask for reviews and referrals.

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Next is email. Many practices have a patient communication system that automatically communicates with the patients such as RevenueWell or SolutionReach. Take a look at emails that are going out and customize them to the current times. There are five different types of emails that are important to customize and send out.

- 1) **Reactivation:** This email should be sent to patients who are past due for an appointment.
- 2) **What to expect during your visit:** This email should be sent 2-3 days before the patient's appointment.
- 3) **Follow up:** This email should be sent after the appointment.
- 4) **Weekly emails to all patients:** A weekly email should be sent to the entire patient base.
- 5) **Personalized:** This email is for patients who you've called and not heard back. Send them a personal email including some of the verbiage above.

Weekly emails to patients should include items such as patient written and video testimonials.. They may also include team videos about what to expect, fun team videos on what is happening in the practice, personal stories of team members, information on PPE / patient safety, inspiring messages and health and dental tips.

Text messages have also become an effective tool. Are you customizing and getting creative with your texts? Use texting to communicate availability

and hours, to schedule appointments, to confirm appointments and to send post-appointment thank you notes. In addition, you can use customized giphy images that reflect your brand and image. By customizing your texts, you are differentiating yourself and strengthening the personal connection.

Engaging your community using social media is more important than ever! People are spending more time on social media and here is your opportunity to engage with your patients and greater community. Even if you were not focused on this before COVID, this is your chance. One of the most valuable tools you can use is getting video patient testimonials. If someone else says it, it must be true! Ask your early adopter patients to take a short video on how great their experience was and post on Facebook, Instagram in addition to using in your weekly emails.. Don't forget to boost posts on Facebook.

Social Media Ideas:

- Post photos of your happy and friendly team members
- Conduct a Facebook Live to answer patient questions
- Scheduling - when and how they can visit the practice
- Promote your In-Office Discount Plan

Video Ideas:

- Patient testimonials showing your "wow" factor
- Create selfie videos to speak to your patients from the heart
- Virtual office walkthrough video on the "new" patient experience
- "Behind the scenes" video of cleaning instruments, door handles...etc.
- New PPE and equipment to keep patients and team members safe
- Team member videos sharing what will be different for patients

Patients and potential patients will be looking at your online presence. Your website should be updated with new hours, videos of the doctor and team explaining new protocols, video testimonials and welcome back message. I'd also suggest utilizing Live Chat.

Last, it is time to turn your online advertising back on! Focused Facebook ads and Google Adwords are important to keep that steady stream of new patients flowing into your practice. We are seeing the following keywords be effective: "Emergency dentistry," "Implants," "Safe Dentistry," "Senior Dentistry" and "Same Day Dentistry."

For a detailed 17 page Engagement Guide, and many other free resources, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/y9vsxly6>. ■

About the Author

As an Executive Coach for Fortune Management, Kim brings over 18 years of Dental Executive Coaching and practice management knowledge to the Colorado Dental community. Kim advises doctors and teams to implement strong systems for maximum effectiveness. Her leadership coaching enhances communication, relationships and accountability. Kim also has a deep understanding of the Business of Dentistry. Passionate about personal growth and professional development, Kim's coaching has people be their best self!