



Sedation Dentistry— *A Proven Business Model*

Dentistry has experienced a metamorphosis recently. New technologies and demographic shifts, including an enlightened consumerism, have had an enormous impact. In addition, emerging disciplines have gained popularity and transformed many practices. One such discipline, sedation dentistry, has increased patient health, resulting in benefits to the business of the practice owner as well.

Oral Conscious Sedation

Dentists have been using sedatives for over a century to calm anxious patients and create an environment more conducive to invasive procedures. But since the introduction of benzodiazepine sedatives in the early 1960s, dentists have had access to safe, effective drugs to create a minimally depressed level of consciousness where the patient is relaxed but still in possession of protective reflexes and able to breathe independently.

Despite the availability of these agents, the percentage of dentists using oral conscious sedation remained small until recently when organizations like the Dental Organization for Conscious Sedation (DOCS) began training dentists. Since then, thousands of dentists have been trained to provide oral sedation.

The Need

Sedation dentistry has become a mainstream service offered by many dentists as a result of the need. Numerous studies have concluded that dental anxiety is

a common reason for avoiding dental care. Sedation allows even the most anxious patient to be comfortable. In addition, sedation dentistry allows care to be completed in fewer appointments.

Practice Benefits

Not only do patients benefit from sedation dentistry, but practices reap advantages as well. The 2 main benefits to the practice are increased profitability and improved quality of the practice environment.

Increased Profitability

“Typical” sedation candidates have a higher financial value to the practice compared to nonsedation patients. This is the result of a history of professional neglect, most often due to fear. This increased production potential means larger cases. Patients often desire longer appointments to minimize visits, making sedation appointments extremely productive. Adding to this increased production potential is the more efficient delivery of care per unit of time with relaxed patients. Dentists experienced with sedation dentistry claim that dentistry can often be performed 25% to 50% faster.

Higher case acceptance is the norm with sedation candidates compared to their nonsedation counterparts. After addressing their primary concerns—comfort and having their dentistry performed in fewer visits—these patients are less motivated by cost of care, insurance coverage, or other third party allowances.

Patients with a higher financial value to the practice mean these practices need fewer new patients and, given the current economic climate, are more recession resistant.

Improved Practice Environment

Practices report more enjoyment from treating patients with sedation by creating a less stressful environment for the patient and for the dentist and team. A less hectic pace results from seeing fewer patients each day. In addition, these patients openly express their appreciation for receiving care they desperately need.

The Sedation Driven Practice

Sedation driven practices treat patients with sedation nearly every day the office is open. These practices may be large or small, but tend to have many characteristics in common.

Low Traffic, High Volume

These practices see fewer patients, yet do more dentistry. Oral sedation dentistry appointments are often 4 hours or longer. The typical schedule involves a morning sedation appointment and nonsedation appointments in the afternoon. Dentists making the transition to a sedation practice mention performing more dentistry during 1 sedation appointment than they used to provide in 2 days of seeing numerous patients.

Proficient in Multiple Disciplines

Because of the needs of the typical sedation candidate and their desire to accomplish as much as possible in the fewest number of appointments, the sedation driven practice is proficient in multiple disciplines. Often included in this arsenal are the standard restorative, crown and bridge, periodontal, and cosmetic care. In addition, these practices find it helpful to address endodontic, implant, and oral surgery needs, minimizing referrals.

Effective Marketing

The sedation driven practice happens as a result of an organized plan focusing on acquiring the necessary training in sedation systems and attracting sedation candidates. The latter requires an approach that overcomes the fear and embarrassment of these patients. Word-of-mouth marketing is less effective. Many of these patients have trust issues, so the marketing message must be empathetic and nonjudgmental. The good news is that there is a large population of these patients, and they are not receiving care. If you can reach them effectively, this will be the best return-on-investment of any marketing you will ever do.

The Method

After assessing a patient's psychological and medical conditions and any drug interactions, the patient is readied for oral conscious sedation. Baseline vitals are acquired, pre- and postoperative instructions reviewed, informed consent obtained, as well as the name and contact information of a companion for transport and care. Financial arrangements are made, and medications prescribed.

Oral sedation protocols call for dentist assessment of the patient on the appointment day and a dose of a sedative appropriate to achieve minimal or moderate sedation. State guidelines regulate sedation administration by dentists that reflect the education, training, and equipment required.

While sedated, the patient is monitored with appropriate equipment and qualified personnel. Before dismissal, patients must satisfy standard criteria, including having the care of a responsible companion.

Highly Profitable

Sedation practices tend to be highly productive and possess relatively low overhead and very high collection rates. Not only are expenditures less when fewer patients are seen, but sedation patients are required to pay in advance to reserve and guarantee their time (high collection rate).

Practice Transformation

Modern-day dental practice offers numerous challenges and equally impressive opportunities. Many practitioners have found sedation dentistry to be a method of addressing the former and taking advantage of the latter. A growing number of dentists are focusing on this tool to transform their practices to more growth, enjoyment, and profit. **DPS**

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