

# 12 EASY

## Initial Consultation Questions to Ask and Help More Patients Get the Care They Need.

Use the information garnered during the first phone call to have a "small talk" conversation at the beginning of the patient's first visit. Then, preview the conversation to follow by saying, "Maria, we want to provide personalized care for all our patients. We want to learn your concerns and desires so we can help you have the dental health and appearance that you truly want. In order for us to give you that kind of care, I'd like to ask you a few questions and write down the answers. Would that be okay?" Record their answers on paper in a nice leather portfolio. Clipboards with broken corners aren't on-brand for most practices. Here are the important elements of the conversation.

1

"We like to get to know our patients. Tell me about your family." Listen and ask follow-up questions. Then ask, "Tell me about your work." Listen and ask follow-up questions. Then ask, "Tell me about what you do in your spare time." Listen and ask follow-up questions. Learn at least ten personal facts about each patient. Don't discuss anything dental-related for the first five minutes of your conversation.

2

"In addition to (information you've learned so far), how can we help you today?" Always start where they are, not where you think they should be. As an example, ask, "In addition to the broken filling on the upper right side that you mentioned on the phone call, how can we help you today?" If their answer involves an interest in a specific service such as implants, ask them, "Are you interested in exploring the possibility of having implants? We can talk to doctor about that in a few minutes." If they say, "Yes," they've taken one small step to case acceptance.

3

"What kinds of dental treatment have you had in the past?" If appropriate, follow-up with "Why was that done?" Here's an example. The patient says, "I had a root canal done on an upper back tooth about five years ago." You ask, "Why did you have the root canal done?" The patient answers, "I had a big metal filling on the tooth. It got decay underneath it, and the nerve got infected." You ask, "Do you have any other big metal fillings in your mouth now?" The patient replies, "I think I have a couple of them." You say, "I'll make sure doctor checks them out for you. We don't want that happening again. Is that okay?" If the patient answers "Yes," he or she has taken one small step to case acceptance. Now ask, "What other kinds of dental treatment have you had in the past? They may answer, "I had a tooth removed on my upper right side three years ago." You reply, "Was the tooth replaced?" They answer, "No." You reply, "That can lead to problems. Would you like to explore some options for replacing the missing tooth?" If they say, "Yes," they've taken a small step to having an implant.

4

"Have you ever had a negative experience in a dental office?" If they answer, "Yes," you reply, "Tell me about that." After they explain the situation, you say, "Wow, that's too bad. We will do our best to make sure that doesn't happen here."



5

"Have you ever had any gum problems or gum surgery?" If they answer, "Yes," you reply, "Tell me about that. Do your gums ever bleed when you brush your teeth?" If they answer, "Yes," you reply. "Oh, that's too bad. I'll make sure Susan, our hygienist, knows about your condition. She can help you with that problem. Okay?" If they say, "Yes," they've taken a small step to accepting your perio therapy program.

6

"Have you ever lost any teeth?" If they answer, "Yes, in addition to the molar on the upper right side, I've lost all my back teeth on the bottom," you reply, "Have you replaced the missing teeth with anything?" They answer, "Yes, I have a removable partial denture." You reply, "How's that working for you?" They answer, "It rocks all the time and doesn't fit like it used to." You say, "There are other options for replacing those teeth. Would you like to talk to doctor about them when she sees you?" If they say, "Yes," they've taken a small step to having implants.

7

Give patients a hand mirror and ask them, "What improvements would you make in the appearance of your teeth if we could easily change anything?" They may say, "I wish they were whiter and weren't so crowded. I have a new position at my bank, and my smile is really important now." You reply, "There are several ways that can be improved. Is that something you want doctor to take a look at?" If they say, "Yes," they've taken a small step towards having cosmetic dentistry. If you see metal restorations in their mouths ask, "What do you think of the appearance of those metal fillings on your back teeth?" If they answer, "Not the greatest," you reply, "Would you like to explore the possibility of having tooth-colored restorations done?" If they say, "Yes," a small step has been taken toward some toothcolored restorations.

8

"On a scale of one to 10, with 10 being extremely important, how important is it for you to keep all your teeth for a lifetime?" If they answer, "It's very important—a 10!" you reply, "Good for you. We will keep that in mind when we discuss any dental care you need." If they answer, "Maybe a two or three," you ask, "Why so low?" They may respond, "Both my parents lost their teeth before 50, and I've lost eight teeth already. I don't have much hope for keeping mine." Of course, it's best to discover this information early rather than late, since now you have an education and possible referral process on your hands. If you discover this attitude late, you may waste everybody's time.

9

"I'm curious. What do you look for in a dentist and his/her team?" Discover what they want, assure them they will receive it and make sure they do. It's interesting that over 80 percent of the time patients comment on relationship issues such as friendliness, not clinical expertise. The vast majority of the time people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

10

"Is there anything that would stand in your way of getting the proper dentistry you need?" This is where money may come up. I hope it does because you want to begin talking about money early. I believe the whole patient-money challenge is such an important topic that I've devoted the entire next chapter to it.

11

"Do you have any time constraints for the completion of your dentistry?" If they do have an upcoming special event such as a wedding, discover the date and show them how their dentistry can be completed, "If we start soon."

12

"Do you have any questions for me?" Briefly answer their questions and/or tell them when they will be answered.

