



Core subject: Legal/Ethical Issues

The devil in you

A skill that can make us feel uncomfortable but often is a mission accomplished without realising: ethical selling

Author: Sharif Islam

CPD: 1 hour

Educational aims and objectives

The article aims to inspire the reader to tackle selling in the practice and to view selling more professionally. It aims to educate the reader on techniques for selling within a practice to patients.

Anticipated outcomes

The reader will be able to sell with more confidence and generate more profits for the practice.

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The devil in you

Sharif Islam looks at a skill that can make us feel uncomfortable but often is a mission accomplished without realising: ethical selling



Dr Sharif Islam BDS graduated from London's King's College School of Medicine and Dentistry in 2001. He has written and had published several articles on dentistry. He works part-time in a private practice in north London, and spends as much time as he possibly can travelling and photographing the world.

It's all a matter of choice nowadays. Limitless choice. With the vast, brimming and bulging cupboards of retail relentlessly spilling their contents over our unwitting and perplexed heads, no one really needs to poke us in the wallet with a hard sell. There's simply an endless buffet of products for us to select from, unaided or abetted by persuasion. Consumers are savvy. Consumers buy on their own initiative and this has replaced the innocence of ignorance in the sales arena. Harold Macmillan was clearly prescient when he declared that 'we've never had it so good.' But while the engorged markets may forever cling to the old notion that infinite choice is good for the consumer, and they may be right, it can also be bewildering. Dentistry is far from immune

The practice can take pride in stocking and providing the patients with products they need to achieve this goal. By any standard, that seems like a very ethical thing to do



to this trap. One only needs to look at the kaleidoscopic array of toothpaste brands on display at the local supermarket to empathise with the burden of choice facing the poor, confused shopper.

CUTTING THROUGH THE FOG

This is where the dental practice can cut through the fog and provide clarity and confidence for their patients. Having a finite supply of selected products is in itself a reassurance, even more so from the knowledge the staff can impart about them. Presenting the opportunity to buy these products in a practice rather than the more impersonal setting of a supermarket is not only convenient, but lends credibility to the products themselves. Anxiety over choice is only a temporary symptom of a dearth of information, and is thus easily

alleviated by effective communication. This communication can come from staff or, more conveniently, from point of sale displays around the practice.

These displays, such as those from Procter and Gamble on the latest Oral-B toothbrush, demonstrate an instant visual idea of how a particular product can help, to say nothing of offering a welcome distraction from the alien sounds and smells within the building. With so many visual aids, the active sell is hardly necessary. The patient has both the relevant information on hand and also the incentive to ask for the product.

CONTINUATION OF CARE

Dental treatment may end in the surgery, but the patient's dentistry is a continual exercise, one for which they need the

SELLING IS A VIRTUE!**REMEMBER...**

- As a professional, your advice carries credibility
- Buying from a dental practice makes the choices easier for the patient
- Patients want to hear your thoughts and preferences. It is your responsibility to sell
- Both proactive and reactive selling works for patients as well as the practice
- Not selling can be detrimental to a patient's oral health if it denies solutions to problems
- To identify the difference between what the patients needs and wants
- Having a finite supply of selected products in your practice is reassurance for patients
- And lastly, selling is not distasteful, it's necessary!



right tools to assist them. Calling their attention, whether directly or indirectly, to dental products designed to augment their oral hygiene is merely a continuation of both the dentist's and the practice's duty of care.

The practice has a responsibility to make their patients aware of the available dental products and also to communicate their efficacy. All of this marries together to enable the patient to make an informed choice, and all of this in pursuit of better dental health.

While some may adopt a note of cynicism that selling these products is simply profiteering, a greater case can be made that their availability is an on-going dialogue in dentistry with the patient, providing a necessary adjunct to their care. In fact, it could ultimately be argued that sermonising oral health instruction is both obligatory and gratifying for their needs.

HINTS AND TIPS

'I don't really think of myself as a salesperson,' says Diane Rochford, but then realises she does it on a daily basis

So, what is 'ethical selling'?

- Identify a patient's wants and needs for their dental health
- Provide treatment options to help attain desired results
- Excellent communication between whole dental team and the patient is vital
- Ask the right questions and listen to the patient

Building the relationship

- Begins with initial telephone call or face-to-face contact
- The aim is for the patient to build confidence and trust
- Be enthusiastic, caring and knowledgeable – and always smile!

Establish the need

- Patients buy what they want, long before what they need
- Establish a patient's concerns, what they would like to achieve for their dental health, and motivators that will help them proceed
- Initial conversation, then a clinical examination followed by a treatment plan

Case presentation

- Remember, sometimes the treatment a patient perceives may be right for them may

not be appropriate to meet specific needs.

- You have a duty of care to educate the patient
- Show photographs of their teeth and before and after cases of what can be achieved
- Explain in layman's terms the benefits for proceeding with the recommended treatment and risks if they do not
- Ask the patient if they have any questions or concerns regarding the recommended treatment

Handling objections

- An objection is usually a request for more information
- Actively listen to the patient's questions or concerns
- Rephrase back to the patient their concern
- Provide them with further information or a solution

Financial arrangements

- Once the patient is happy, the financial arrangements need to be put in place
- A range of financial options should be in place that make it easier for patients to invest in the treatment, but do not impact on the practice's financial commitments
- This discussion should be done in a very professional manner and any concerns the patient may have addressed before scheduling the first appointment

References available on request

ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENCE

Selling anything to a patient within a practice can sometimes be an uncomfortable or guilt-laden experience for staff. After all, the patient may have just walked out of the surgery with enough dentistry in their mouth to pay for a commercial space flight, and then to impose upon them for a few pennies more over a toothbrush seems churlish at best.

But if the patient is educated in the first to the benefits of certain aspects of oral hygiene, then the products that deliver the result suddenly seem necessary. The loftier goal of promoting independence for the patient easily transcends the profit. The more they can do in the comfort of their own bathroom, the less will eventually be necessary in the surgery.

Dentistry still retains its deserved merit as a profession that can change people's lives. It will always be this way. But the

increasing commercialisation of dental health doesn't necessarily threaten this mystique. It only adds to it, bridging that extra mile that empowers the patients to gain more decisive control over their own health.

The practice can take pride in stocking and providing the patients with products they need to achieve this goal. By any standard, that seems like a very ethical thing to do. **CPD**



Diane Rochford qualified as a hygienist from Guy's Hospital in 1996. She joined Dr Linda Greenwall's team in September 1996 where she assists with teaching on bleaching courses. Diane is also a clinical coach for Jameson Management.



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Hertford House
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