

HAPPY CALL CENTRES MAKE HAPPY CALLERS

The call centre is usually perceived as exclusively for bigger companies with large call volumes. However, many of the techniques used in call centres can be used as a guide for smaller businesses, such as dental practices, forming an essential aspect of your customer service offering.

“Customer care can be made very simple but it is also easily neglected in the rush of every day life. However, recognising the importance of great customer service can ensure the success of your business and will make both your staff and your patients happy”, says Julia Dawson, director of customer services at Denplan.

As a consumer you will probably have found that you are far more likely to go back to a company to buy again, if you had received good customer service or advice. If your surgery does everything in its power to make patients feel relaxed, cared-for and respected, it stands to reason that they will value the experience and return. This is not always straight forward however, so here are a few top tips.

First point of call

The first point of contact patients will have with your practice is generally your receptionist. Therefore it is important that they deliver knowledgeable and friendly customer service.

Make sure that your reception team always answer the telephone and greet your patients in a bright, friendly manner. This may seem like common sense, but in a busy practice, when you are juggling many tasks at once, it is easy to neglect customer care. A positive attitude in your staff will certainly affect the overall experience patients have of your surgery and make them far more likely to return regularly.

Great service will also help you attract new patients, as existing patients will tell their friends and colleagues. A word of mouth recommendation is far more powerful than any advert and is a real indication of how effective your customer care is. Why not ask your new patients to fill in a short questionnaire to find out where they heard about you. This would also be a great opportunity to find out how they rate your customer care.

Avoid time wasting

One of the things that consistently comes up when discussing poor call centre experiences is being kept on hold for long periods of time. If you are unable to deal with a call straight away, let the caller know you will deal with their query and call them back. This not only makes the patient feel valued, but also allows you to look into more complex queries at a quieter time of day when it is more convenient for you.

For a practice that has lots of patients, there are often periods of the day that have particularly high call volumes. By monitoring the calls throughout the day you can identify these times and ensure you have sufficient cover to attend to all the calls in the future.

Another example of poor customer care is having automated answering services in place during working hours. These may be more convenient for your team, but is often a waste of time for your patients, as they prefer to speak to a real person. This allows your patients to explain their queries in their own words and will often help your team resolve their call straight away.

When you're happy, your customers are happy

Happy, motivated employees are essential to a successful business and will keep your customers happy in turn, as patients will pick up on this positive atmosphere. However, keeping your staff happy can only be achieved by valuing them as much as you do your patients.

Why not treat your team by giving their break-room a make over, or treating them occasionally with a day out of the office to take part in a charitable activity, training or fun team-building day?

Some companies offer tailor-made training days, which are specific to your practice's needs and can even incorporate a module focused on customer care. Some of these courses can also count towards verifiable Continuing Professional Development (CPD) when undertaken in accordance with GDC requirements. This type of event provides an ideal opportunity for staff in similar roles to meet and learn together, and will benefit both your employees and your practice.

These companies can also offer software that allows patient information to be automatically updated on a daily basis. It works by constantly synchronising your data with its own for the most up-to-date information. This will help to streamline your administration process, giving you more time to spend on your patients' needs.

It is the constant desire to make each customer feel individual and welcome at every point where they come in contact with your business, which will set you apart from your competition. Whether this is by phone, letter, email, text or face to face, every aspect of your customer service must reflect your desire to be friendly, helpful and professional.

Top Tips

- get the greeting right – this applies to everyone who calls the practice
- questions are welcome – if potential or existing patients have queries, treat it as a chance to impress
- if you cannot answer a patient's needs straight away, take their number and get back to them as soon as possible.
- use the patient's name and check how they prefer to be addressed – this makes them feel respected and valued
- if you have had to leave a patient on hold, acknowledge this and apologise for the delay
- listen to complains – complaints help you put right problems and avoid them in the future.

Notes to Editors:

About Denplan

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