



Use Dental Meetings to Combat the “February Patient Slowdown”

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Two events take place every February here in Chicago.

The first February event is what I've termed the “February Patient Slowdown.” Why does this phenomenon occur? There are quite a few possible contributing factors. I've found that most patients who want surgical or restorative dental work after their annual insurance maximum refreshes Jan. 1 do so in the first four weeks of the year. This excess January patient flow leaves a depression in February. It's also possible that some patients are paying off credit cards after the holidays and may not be eager to splurge on dental expenses. A third reason could be that, in Chicago, February is often when bitter cold temperatures start to abate. Moods are lifted, and people are more inclined to leave their homes and seek fun activities that likely don't include a high-speed handpiece or a sickle scaler.

The second February event is the Chicago Dental Society (CDS) Midwinter Meeting. This year marks its 153rd convention, and I cannot help but be in awe of the number dentists who have attended over the years as well as the vast array of concepts and technology that have been discussed. It's not a coincidence that the Midwinter Meeting and the February Patient Slowdown occur in the same month — I feel it's designed to help you as a dental professional.

In my opinion, organized dental meetings such as the Midwinter and the AGD Scientific Session are incredibly important for our profession for three main reasons: professional networking, continuing education and dental technology. As dental professionals, we can utilize these three concepts to combat the February Patient Slowdown doldrums. Professional networking fosters new relationships and nourishes existing ones. Get out there and connect, or reconnect, with other like-minded professionals. Create your own web of trusted individuals with whom you can share your professional lives and challenges. Roundtable discussions are a great way to brainstorm marketing ideas, solve staffing issues, increase or alter patient flow patterns and learn about new techniques and concepts.

Use the Midwinter Meeting to hone your education and take a variety of classes. No matter where your career is, there will always be something new to learn. From practice management to procedural techniques to self-improvement, the courses at the Midwinter Meeting almost certainly

have something interesting and educational for every dentist and staff member. Take this information back to your practice and apply it in a way to minimize this year's February Patient Slowdown.

Finally, let's talk gear. Technology by itself does not make a top-tier practice, but it is a vital component. I'm not saying that you need to buy the newest version of everything every year, but you certainly should stay informed. In doing so, you'll be able to decide what purchases would benefit your practice. I find it efficient that so many dental product manufacturers and retailers literally are lined up under one roof at these organized dental meetings. Every year, colleagues tell me that they didn't walk the showroom floor because they weren't "looking to buy anything right now." I've never understand this. Not walking the showroom floor limits your knowledge. Get out on the floor, and walk up and down each aisle! With the number of vendors at the Midwinter Meeting, this is no small task. Make the experience as detailed as you want — from visiting every booth and comparing pricing and products to what you already have to window shopping only to see what's new. Doing so will not only keep you informed, but may spark an interest that you had not anticipated. Discovering a previously unknown product that can impact patient care is a phenomenal feeling. Market your newly discovered tech to your patients. Tell them why you're so excited about it. It will help your office marketing and may reignite existing patient interest. Remember, it doesn't have to be an expensive product. If it makes you happy, it will make patients happy. It's amazing how a new wedge design for restorative or a newly designed needle holder for suturing can reinvigorate your practice, and this translates to even better patient care.

Can't make it to an organized dental meeting? Each of us has a smaller version right down the street. Periodically, I walk the dental aisles at the local grocery store or pharmacy. Patients may not ask about professional tech, but you can bet they'll ask you about new over-the-counter (OTC) products. Stay up to date with the OTC products as much as professional tech, and you'll make a lot of patients happy and well informed.

Don't let the February Patient Slowdown slow *you* down! Visit the CDS Midwinter Meeting, AGD 2018 in New Orleans or a similar dental meeting this year, and focus on professional networking, continuing education and learning about technology. It will at least be a fun time out of the office, but I bet that you leave a much more informed and comprehensive dentist.

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