



The Private Dentist's Proactive Response to the Economic Slow Down

I think it's important for you to know that **J. White and Associates** is here to help you in any way possible. Please call us with any thoughts or concerns that you may have. You're not alone; we are working for your best interests.

What should you do in response to the current economic conditions? First of all, do not panic, and above all, stay focused on continuing to perform great dentistry and taking care of the needs and wants of your patients. Remember, the need for dentistry does not go away. Yes, we are seeing many practices slowing down and doctors' schedules beginning to have some open time. Let's stay the course, do not waver, and *please turn off CNN*.

Most of what you're reading, hearing and seeing is due more to fear economic fears tied to a slowdown in spending and a sell off on Wall Street rather than reality. Plus, traditionally, the fourth quarter has seen historically slower growth because many patients have used all of their dental insurance benefits for the year.

What You Should Do

The current economic conditions are changing the way dentists interact with and recommend treatment to their patients. The well-prepared and focused dentist can maneuver an economic slowdown and keep their patients coming back. You don't have to wait around for the economy to improve. The key here is to be proactive. Here are some thoughts for you:

Private dental offices have the singular advantage of knowing their patients well. Their strength has always been in the close personal relationships with patients.

Review your new patient experience and make it as personal as possible. You should learn at least ten personal things about a patient before you do an examination. Take 30 minutes to sit down with a new patient before their clinical visit to get to know them and to develop trust. Ask questions about them and disclose to them who you are and the values that drive your team. The goal is to help them become comfortable with you and your future recommendations. We have trained many patient coordinators over the years to do just this, so call us if you have questions.

The use of third party financing must continue to be offered so that payment plans can easily fit into their budget. Offering to pay the interest for them will especially be important.

Be ready for a future increase in demand for your services from those patients who postponed their preventive visits.

Use extra time for fine-tuning your systems. Be sure that your recall system is functioning at a high level. Patients you cannot reach during the day should be contacted at night. Calling from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. works well. If patients are put off by that, say that we simply couldn't reach them during the day so that's why we're calling now - we're concerned. Make it a priority to work the delinquent recall list. Send letters and follow up with a personal call. Every letter should be personally signed and have a handwritten postscript (P.S.) at the bottom. The first thing the patient will look at is your handwritten note.

You must give patients a compelling reason to have them schedule now, not sometime next year. This reason will rarely be clinical only. What are the non-clinical benefits to the patient for doing the dentistry that you are recommending? Ask the team to figure this out at the morning huddle and then discuss it with the patient in the hygiene room. Avoiding dental issues during the upcoming holidays with family and friends will be powerful. Call us for a list of non-clinical benefits of recommended dentistry.

Be sure to employ the skills and talents of the team to its fullest. Be sure that after the doctor's exam in the hygiene room, that the hygienist endorses the doctor's recommendations more than casually. The assistants can do the same when they see an emergency patient in their schedule, especially if there is more dentistry to do than just the emergency procedure.

Review your case presentation skills. Communications are critical at this time. To get patients to move forward on your recommendations, you must discuss with them the clinical **and** non-clinical benefits of the treatment. If patients want to go home and think about it, you must review your communications because the patient perceives that the money you asked them to pay is greater than the benefits they perceive from the treatment.

Be sure to include in your patient conversation the consequences of doing nothing. You might as well hit the nail on the head because this is the question in many patients' minds. Get it on the table and talk about it.

Quality is perceived in your patient's mind by the amount of personal time spent with them. Now that you may have more time available, be sure to spend it on patients who are in the office right now. Take time to have a more thorough discussion about potential treatment and why it should be scheduled sooner rather than later.