



# How to improve your profitability through a treatment co-ordinator

In this first instalment of a two-part feature, Lina Craven highlights how you can take your practice to the next level with a treatment co-ordinator and discusses some of the characteristics that make an ideal candidate

An effective practice ensures that every member of its team has a purpose that is fully exploited for the benefit of the business and the creation of a treatment co-ordinator (TC) role is no exception. While many practices know how to attract patients, their case acceptance ratio is low. All that effort and opportunity wasted!

## The TC role can enhance nearly every aspect of your practice

The first contact, first visit and follow up are the most important elements of the new patient process, yet they frequently represent a wasted opportunity because of a lack

of skill, focus or time, or all three. The introduction of a TC will change your entire approach to new patient care, as well as positively influencing your profitability. The TC position enhances nearly every aspect of your practice.

## Delegating the new patient process is crucial

In my experience, a major downfall of practices is the unwillingness of practitioners to delegate to staff the new patient process or what we now call the treatment co-ordinator role. This is often due to a wide range of factors, including:

- The practitioner's perception that the patient always wants to hear 'it' from them
- The perception that patients pay to see the practitioner
- A lack of trust to empower staff
- A lack of time to train staff
- The financial implications of introducing the new role.

Relinquishing new patient management to well-trained staff is not a new trend, although its application has been limited in Ireland. However, patients' expectations, competition for work, and the team's demand for career progression and job satisfaction are key drivers for introducing the TC role.

This is what practice manager Linda Wallis had to say about her experience of introducing a TC to her practice: 'Although I was fairly optimistic, our three orthodontists were not. "Parents will always want to speak to us. We will be inundated with complaints if parents are not able to speak to the orthodontists," they said.

'I can now report that not only are we not inundated with complaints, but our two treatment co-ordinators receive numerous compliments on how nice it is to be able to sit and talk to someone they [the patients] feel completely at ease with.'

## PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

### What is a treatment co-ordinator?

A TC is someone in your practice who, with the right skills and training, will facilitate the new patient process. The TC bridges the gap between the new patient and the practice and staff. The TC promotes and sells the practice and its services by revealing their true value to prospective patients. The TC frees up the practitioner's time, increases case acceptance ratios and, as a direct result, increases practice profits.

Consider the time spent by the practitioner with the new patient and think how much of that time is non-diagnostic. A TC can often reduce 'practitioner/patient time' by up to 60%; you work out the maths! And rather than this being a barrier to patients – which is indeed what many practitioners think – in my experience patients actually feel much more at ease with the TC and therefore better informed.

Remember: 'dentist time is NOT always dentist time'. As a typical example, if a new patient appointment is 30 minutes but the clinical 'bit' is actually only 15 minutes, there is potentially 15 free minutes available. Think of the impact on the appointment diary of an additional 15 minutes for every new patient!

### What qualities does a great TC need?

Candidates who make good TCs possess, among other things:

- Good understanding (through training and/or experience) of the speciality they work in
- Enthusiasm about the practice and treatments you offer. In my experience, individuals who are enthusiastic about the practice and the treatments offered make excellent TCs. You cannot sell a service if you do not believe in it
- Excellent listening and questioning skills and show great empathy. People buy from people. If the TC listens to the patients' needs then case acceptance ratios will increase. It is not a 'hard sell'. The TC presents the new patient with options and assists them in their decision-making by way of excellent communication skills
- Effective organisational abilities. He/she prioritises the day ahead and effectively and efficiently manages time
- Outstanding communication skills. As he/she is the bridge between the new patient and staff, this quality is vitally important
- A high degree of professionalism. At times this can be a challenging role, especially with difficult patients, practitioners or staff. No matter what the situation,

staying calm and maintaining a professional manner is important

• An ability to see the 'big picture'. Having a vision is important to the success of any practice. Knowing where you are going and how you are getting there is half the battle. The other half is having staff understand and follow your vision.

### Can the role be filled internally?

There are no hard and fast rules. It depends upon the size and aspirations of your practice and the qualities of existing members of your team. If you have a team member that fulfils the characteristics of a TC and he/she wants the challenge, then the answer is yes. (Keep in mind that you may well need to replace their current position. Some practices streamline job descriptions, allowing them to create the new role without having to hire another staff member.)

Whether it is a full-time role or not depends upon a number of factors, including: how large the practice is; the number of practitioners, chairs and patients; what the profit aspirations are, etc. Many practices flirt with the change by implementing the role and watching its progress and impact; this often helps the team to accept the change and gives the practitioner(s) the opportunity to assess any

training needs of the TC and how remuneration will be affected.

### A winning role

Augmenting your team with a treatment co-ordinator can reap tremendous rewards for you, the team and your patients. A treatment co-ordinator's tailored and personal approach to care, follow-up and communication with patients fosters trust and increases patient satisfaction and retention. 

*Lina Craven is the founder and director of Dynamic Perceptions Ltd. Over the past 25 years Lina has assisted orthodontic practices to realise their vision of success through the achievement of a customer-driven culture that focuses on delivering an exceptional patient journey. Lina's qualifications and experience as an orthodontic therapist, treatment coordinator (TC) and practice manager validate her position as advisor to those European orthodontic practices wishing to achieve something special and she is very excited to be presenting her highly successful two-day workshop, 'The treatment co-ordinator and the new patient process' in Dublin on 28 and 29 February 2008. Visit [www.orthodontic-management.com](http://www.orthodontic-management.com) for further details.*

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