

HOW TO SELL YOUR PRACTICE MEMBERSHIP PLAN

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The business of dentistry

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We've gathered together some hints, tips and example scripts to support you when it comes to talking to your patients about your dental membership plan.

It is important when taking on board this advice that you maintain your own personality, your practice ethos and that you adapt the conversation to suit different personality types. In essence these samples highlight the key messages that all your dental team needs to deliver.

If you genuinely believe you are offering value for money, with a system that encourages regular visits and a sensible approach to a patients' dental health then there is no need for a strict process, it's simply about a natural conversation with the patient. You should never go down the route of a hard sell.

You need to talk about the dental membership plan as something that is central to the practice that you all believe is of genuine benefit to the patient, both in terms of encouraging regular visits and delivering excellent value for money.

The most important thing to have from a dental membership plan perspective is belief. A belief from everyone in the practice team that offering dental membership plans is a great solution for the patient to fund quality private dental care and not just something that is convenient for the practice.

The team knowing their stuff when it comes to the features and benefits of the plan is far more persuasive to a prospective member rather than trying to bluff your way through. Make sure every member of the team is well trained, knows how the plan works and how best to communicate it.

Ensure the team discusses the benefits of the plan – not just the features.

What we mean by this is that the patient won't be buying two check-ups and two hygiene visits a year. They're buying into the understanding that regular visits will help prevent bigger problems in future, or that the monthly Direct Debit breaks larger maintenance costs into smaller, more manageable chunks, etc.

New patient enquiry

When you have a new patient enquiry into the practice, your main objective when dealing with that enquiry is not to launch into all of the plan options that you have available. At this point in time your number-one aim is to get them booked in for a new patient consultation as well as it being the perfect time to 'mention' that the practice operates on a membership plan basis in order to help them maintain optimum dental health through regular visits – reducing the risk of restorative treatment by catching dental problems early.

Prescribing the plan in surgery

It is really important that the membership plan conversation starts in earnest in the surgery. As dentists, you all need to be comfortable talking about the plan in a very simple, conversational style, it's never a presentation. If the patient is not sure whilst discussing the benefits in the practice, the reception team can pick up the conversation and will give them one of the plan leaflets to take away and read through, most will then come back and sign up.

When dealing with any patient, the conversation should be different in terms of what the clinician says in surgery to the conversation held at the reception desk. If it is a conversation with a treatment coordinator it will be a combination of both.

To get the best result, it is crucial that the dentist does the endorsement of the membership plan face-to-face with the patient in surgery.

Patients respect and trust their dentist's knowledge and advice when it comes to maintaining their dental health. They are more likely to join the plan upon your recommendation as the best way to maintain a healthy smile.

As a clinician your focus should always be on maintaining the health of your patient so your conversation may go as follows:

In surgery, dentist conversation example

'Mrs Smith (or use the patients first name if appropriate), my preference for all of my patients is to be on one of our membership plans. I know for a fact that patients who join attend more regularly for their appointments, and this enables me to keep on top of their dental health and detect any problems earlier, which in turn usually means less invasive treatments are required in the long run.

As part of the plan, there are also regular hygiene visits which play a crucial role. Control and prevention of gum inflammation/disease is extremely important, we know that if you have gum disease, you are more likely to suffer from things like heart attacks and strokes, and there is research going on into other conditions like Alzheimer's, rheumatoid arthritis, lung conditions and some cancers.

I feel you would really benefit from joining the plan and would recommend option X for you, why don't you have a chat with the girls on the desk and they will be able to give you more information about this?'

OR

'Michelle, I prefer my patients to join our practice membership plan and I would like you to consider joining. I know that those who do, attend more regularly, which in turn means I see them more often which allows me to detect problems earlier and keep them healthier and often leads to less treatment being needed. Why don't you have a chat to the girls on reception and they can tell you more about the benefits?'

In surgery, nurse prompt example

Nurse: *'Dr X, please can you confirm whether Mr Smith would suit our practice membership?'*

Continuing the membership conversation at reception

At this point the dentist has prescribed the membership plan to the new patient.

Once you have checked how they have got on and you have gone through their treatment plan with them, you need to talk about them becoming a member of the practice. Being a member on plan needs to be your default position, patients need to feel that this is what all of your patients do when they join the practice.

When the patient reaches the reception desk the focus on the membership conversation is different, they will want to know that the plan is value for money. They will be mentally adding up the cost of your examinations, hygiene appointments and x-rays to check that they won't be disadvantaged joining the plan.

At this point it is useful to have some show-and-tell tools on the desk to support with the conversation.

- **Acid test** – this shows the cost comparison between the plan membership and pay-as-you-go costs
- **Plan breakdown** – further details on the specific membership plan you are discussing
- **Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme** details.

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Reception, new patient conversation example

'Mrs Smith, Dr X has recommended that you become a member on plan X, let me show you what this looks like.'

At this point show them the cost comparison between the plan membership and pay-as-you-go. Remember, if they are having any treatments to mention the discount they would receive. Only talk about the membership option at this point, once you have explained the benefits to them allow them to respond by ending with...

"How does that sound? "

If they are happy with what you have presented then go ahead and complete the Agreement.

If, however they are not sure or ask for further information, or need more time to consider then you can respond with one of the following:

Want more time/ info to decide but coming back for further appointment

'That's no problem Mrs Smith let me give you some literature to take home and have a look at then when you come in next week for your treatment, we can pick this back up then'.

Please note, if you're using the patient home sign up you can also offer this as an option and offer to send the link to them via email.

Want more time/ info to decide but not coming back for further appointment until next recall due

'That's no problem Mrs Smith let me give you some literature to take home and have a look at then if it's ok with you, I will give you a call next week to answer any further question you may have. If you do decide to join the plan then your next appointments will be covered when you come in.'

In this scenario it is really important that you don't let this patient slip through the net, you must have an action plan to follow up anyone who is undecided.

Don't want to join the plan, want to stay as pay-as-they-go

'That's absolutely fine Mrs Smith, just as long as you are aware that it will cost you more if you pay-as-you-go but there will be the option to join later if you change your mind.'

Don't want to commit now/but suggest that they sign up at their next visit

'Of course, however please be aware that you do need to have been a member for six months to enjoy the full benefits and for your next examination and hygiene visit to be included. Therefore you will need to pay in full for these appointments. Whereas if you join today you will get your next examination and hygiene appointment included, so no need to pay, plus you will get discount on any fissure sealants and receive eligibility to request assistance from the Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme straight away.'

Don't have their bank details to complete today

'That is no problem I can give you the form to take home and all you need to do is fill in your bank details, and return it in this prepaid envelope. If you would like I can give you a ring in a week to confirm we have received your membership form back.'

Please note, if you're using the patient home sign up you can also offer this as an option and offer to send the link to them via email.

Existing private pay-as-you-go patients

Patients sometimes do not want to commit to joining your membership plan straight away. This can be for many reasons but it is often because they want to check you out first and ensure they are happy with the dentist and the practice before signing up to a regular Direct Debit.

The mistake most practices make is that they never go back and approach these patients at a later date to offer them the option to join.

Change your mind-set and make joining your membership the norm and PAYG out of the ordinary.

Existing patients - point of arrival

Always tell patients about your membership scheme on arrival at the practice when they check in at reception:

'Good morning/afternoon, Mr Smith, has anyone spoken to you about our practice membership plan? The membership plan has many benefits, for example, you can spread the cost of your routine dental care throughout the year, and you would receive substantial discounts on many of the treatments provided at the practice, then should you have an accident or need to see a dentist in an emergency you would have access to our Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme, which we could apply to for some funding to help with the cost of this?

Why don't you take a brochure and read it through while you are waiting to see the dentist? Then, if you would like to know more, or would like to become a member, we can complete an Agreement with you at reception.'

OR

'Good morning/afternoon, Mr Smith. Are you aware that we have launched our own practice membership plan? The plan has many benefits, for example, you can spread the cost of your routine dental care throughout the year, you will receive substantial discounts on additional treatments that are required or you request, and should you have an accident or need to see a dentist in an emergency, you will have access to the Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme.

Why don't you take a brochure and read it through while you are waiting to see the dentist? The brochure explains the full benefits of joining and tells you exactly what is included in your monthly payments. If you would like to become a member, you will need to complete an Agreement at reception.'

Make sure that the reception team signal to the dentist/nurse that the membership conversation has begun.

Existing patient - in surgery

The conversation with the dentist should be the same as above – remember, the key is prescribing the plan.

Existing patient - reception conversation

Once the dentist has discussed the plan with the patient in surgery.

'Hi Mrs Hardy, Dr Green / John mentioned that he had spoken to you about joining our membership plan.

This is a great option that allows you to budget for all of your routine prevention including examinations, hygiene and any small x-rays that we may need to take. In addition to this, should you require any treatments then you will benefit from our members' fee rates which offer a discount on our pay-as-you-go fees. This also includes access to a Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme that we can request assistance for help with any costs, should you have an accident or need to see a dentist outside normal hours, or on holiday.

I strongly recommend you join as this is by far the best option to keep you healthy. How does that sound?'

Alternative quick conversation starters...

- Have you heard of our practice membership?
- Your exam/hygiene would have been included today if you were a member, would you like to hear more?
- Our members save X%
- Members of our practice pay less for their routine dentistry than private pay-as-you-go, would you like to see a sample of our fees comparison table?
- Would you like the ability to spread the cost of your routine appointments monthly instead of paying in lump sums when you come in?
- If not offering NHS: Although we are not NHS we do offer a low-cost membership plan which includes routine appointments, discounts on treatments, Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme and other benefits.
- If offering NHS: Although a private offering, our practice membership offers a way to budget for private appointments, savings and Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme and special offers throughout the year.

Would you questions...

Reception: *'Hi Mr Smith, following your appointment today, please can I ask you:*

- *'Would you like healthy teeth and gums for life?'*
- *'Would you like to not have to pay each time you come for an appointment?'*
- *'Would you like to reduce the amount of time you are here?'*
- *'Would you like to not have to pay should you need an emergency appointment?'*
- *'Would you like to receive 10% discount should you need a treatment such as a filling?'*

Other opportunities

If the patient is due to receive treatment at their next visit, highlight the discount that they would be entitled to:

'If you decide to join our practice membership plan, Mr Smith, you will receive 10% discount on the treatment you need, saving £X. Let me give you some information to have a look at the benefits. How does that sound?'

If the patient has not taken the opportunity to join, but has received unexpected, expensive treatment at their appointment, take the opportunity of offering the membership scheme again at the point of payment:

'Are you sure you wouldn't like to join our membership scheme, Mr Smith? The treatment that you have received today will be discounted by 10% if you choose to join, saving you £X.'

'If you would like to join, we just need to complete an Agreement which I can do with you now. I have a brochure here for you to have a look at and some more details about the Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme included in our membership plans. How does that sound?'

Common questions/concerns

Q What is the Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme?

A The Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme, is a scheme for dental plan members that allows patients to request assistance in the event of a dental trauma and/or dental emergency or oral cancer. Plan members are also eligible to request assistance should they be made redundant. Assistance can be requested for things such as external trauma, permanent facial disfigurement and hospitalisation. It also allows you to request assistance towards the cost of dental implants in the event of a dental trauma. Let me give you... or alternatively you can visit scheme.practiceplan.co.uk/patients which explains the scheme in more detail.

Q It sounds very expensive – I don't think I can afford it!

A If you join our practice membership you will be saving money, you will be able to budget monthly and spread the cost of your routine treatment throughout the year. In addition, you will receive a discount off any further routine treatments and have access to our Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme.

Show them the fee-per-item/plan comparison.

By joining and seeing your dentist regularly, you will be able to maintain a healthy mouth, and hopefully reduce any additional treatment needs. Of course, you are free to choose any of the treatment options available at the practice and will always qualify for a discount on routine treatments. Would you like to become a member?


Patient housekeeping


Keeping a simple and clear note on patient records is key. Make a record on patient notes that the plan has been prescribed. This signals to the reception team that the patient has been made aware of the plan and to continue the conversation.


Similarly, if a patient declines to join at that point in time or later during a follow up get the reception team to make a note in the patient records to bring up the conversation about membership at regular intervals, at least once a year as you would a medical history. Remember, patients' circumstances may change and a no now doesn't mean a no forever.

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