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## PATIENT COMPLIANCE - KEY TO SUCCESSFUL DENTAL TREATMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Despite revolutionary advances in all fields of dentistry, a critical factor in the success of any treatment program is patient compliance. A number of factors are involved in encouraging and ensuring cooperative patients including effective communication which is vital in motivating and educating patient. Dentist must consider many factors to gain a true assessment of his patient. Throughout this article we will explore what influences patient compliance and review methods used in dental literature.

**Keywords:** Compliance, adherence, patient satisfaction, dental plaque

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### Introduction

Teeth are like precious gems and stones of a person, which if maintained properly throughout one's life, are good for his own physical, social and psychological well being. To preserve this priceless, yet least cared for gift of nature, it's important to make him realize the importance of good oral hygiene practise in his life. Nearly every person will be in need of dental treatment in his lifetime, whether purely for health causes or alternately for aesthetic issues yet the main reasons of seeking dental treatment are in fact caries, gingivitis and periodontitis. Using simple techniques such as oral rinsing, flossing and brushing of teeth are normally sufficient for obtaining good oral health. If this is actually the case then how is it that we are witnessing a massive spread of dental problems? How come there are so many incidents of people suffering from dental problems if the preventive care is so easy to manage? The answer lies in the concept of adherence, referring to the cooperation of an individual with demands of his treatment regime and the dental staff[1].

### Role of compliance factor in dentistry

Many people are not so much concerned about their oral health. So efforts should be taken both by the dentist and the individual to improve their oral health. Negligence in maintaining oral hygiene causes periodontal diseases and caries and the most important causative agent for these complications is dental plaque. Therefore its important to make an individual realize the importance of proper oral hygiene in his life. To make a person realize this, compliance factor plays an important role.

Now the question arises what is compliance? Patient compliance may be defined as the extent to which a person's behaviour coincides with medical or oral health related advice. It reflects a patient's willingness to comply with preventive or therapeutic strategies as set forth by his or her health care provider[2].

To make a patient comply with your instructions, the first impression is the most important. The initial interaction between patient and clinician sets the stage for the entire relationship. One of the foremost responsibilities of a dental professional is to be in control of this relationship at all times. It is imperative for the doctor to have a strong assessment of his patient in order to administer the best possible treatment and ensure successful patient compliance in the future[3].

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### Techniques for initial contact

Introduce yourself by name, Use pleasing facial gestures, Make eye contact, Make physical contact like hand shake, Use a positive opening phrase, Ask patient how they wish to be addressed, Use the patients name, Open discussion with a question, Listen when the patient speak, look at the patient, Provide an explanation before performing[4].

When the patient comes to a dental clinic try to discuss each and every aspect of dental disease, the treatment procedure and their outcomes. Try to understand the state of mind of the patient and interact with patient in simple language, spend optimum time with patient during his visit.

Frequent nodding while listening to the patient are all essential in building patients confidence in his doctor. Patients are prone to praise, so if patient is going on right track, praise him with words of appreciation to foster his compliance. These words of appreciation can show stunning results. Verbal instructions along with hand written notes should be given on patients OPD card so that when he goes back home he reads and remember your words and practise your advice at home. Compliance of the patient is maintained for a shorter period of time with minimal instruction than following more elaborate instruction[5].

Do not hesitate to call the patients who miss their appointment. Encourage patient to perform brushing with family so that they are bonded together when oral hygiene practises are inculcated into their lifestyles. Give some sticker to be stucked on wash room which reminds him to perform regular oral hygiene. Mobile screen savers can be handy in reminding the patients of their oral hygiene. Disclosing agents are best for use in evaluating the effectiveness of oral hygiene. The use of disclosing tablets have been reported to improve efficiency of oral hygiene[5].

The essential elements of an office based programme and issues to be considered to encourage compliance with general preventive and post procedure instructions are key for patient compliance and oral health. Even high adherence levels can be achieved in a primary care setting.<sup>[6]</sup> Factors in compliance include age, sex, socioeconomic status, patient satisfaction, systemic health and attitudes. Careful selection and recommendation of oral hygiene aids, dentifrices and rinses may help to increase patient compliance[2].

Women are more compliant than males as shown in literature.<sup>[7]</sup> The compliance producing factors were, primarily the establishment of sympathy and an informal relationship between dentist and patient. The patients habit of regularly making visit to a dentist in a complex way is also contributing to compliance[8].

Even relationships between the dentist and his patient depend upon the psychological status of both. The

dentist temper and emotional requirement as well as, though to a lesser degree, patient temper and his her mental abnormalities are source of potential complications in these relationships[9].

Patient involvement is a must in prediction of future outcome of a treatment. Personality traits mainly neuroticism, showed significant influences on oral impact on daily performance among patients under periodontal maintenance.<sup>[10]</sup> Oral health surveys have shown that even in countries with established pattern of oral hygiene habits, most individuals have relatively poor gingival health. This is due to a low interest in complying with oral health procedures. There are a great number of general factors influencing the dental behaviour of populations such as culture, diet, overall level of education, domestic circumstances, disposable incomes, availability of total dental manpower[1].

Compliance has also been regarded as a risk factor in periodontitis.<sup>[10]</sup> Patients compliance with respect to their regular appointments and regular visits have an important role in the result outcome of a treatment plan. A study done to investigate the incidence and reasons for tooth loss reported that active periodontal therapy without periodontal maintenance predisposes patient to lose more teeth compared with patients who undergo periodontal maintenance.<sup>[11]</sup> Typical reasons for non compliance are stressful life events, depression, alcoholism, boredom, individual concerns, marital problems and work related stress.

Students are seen to be non compliant in conditions of stress such as during their examination periods. Stress should also be included as a factor in models of patient compliance and health behaviour.<sup>[12]</sup> Also insufficient social network and social support, low interest in oral health and memory loss have been reported to result in non compliance. Finally perceived loss of interest in maintenance care and loss of empathy from the side of dentist have been found to reverse patient's motivation to complicated home care regimen. A frequently suggested reason for non compliance is the external locus of control. The internal locus of control, the individual himself or herself, is the one who take charge of his or her own health care situation. An external locus of control is determined by various environmental factors which the individual feels are out of his reach to decide about.<sup>[13]</sup> The outcome of a disease is largely dependent on patients attitude and patients involvement contributed strongly to the prediction of the oral health variables.<sup>[14]</sup>

### Conclusion

Although dentists are still highly regarded and widely trusted by the majority of populace, there is still much work that can be done order to instil a greater sense of trust into their patients and to improve the dynamics of patient dentist relationship. For a consultation based upon

mutual trust and communication, both parties must accommodate each other's needs and demands for equal roles in the entire process. Dentists should be the one to relinquish more control and take an active role in understanding and valuing their patients as individuals.

Moreover, to ensure a successful relationship and continuity in the treatment process, dentists need to focus on building a strong sense of trust that pervades all aspects of dentist-patient interactions.

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