

Asking for Referrals...

*Is it part of your natural conversation?
Or an awkward after-thought?*

We all know we should be asking for referrals. It's one of the most awkward and uncomfortable things we do. We fear coming across as 'desperate'. The truth is that patients are actually flattered – if you go about it the right way and not look at asking for referrals as an awful chore you have to check off of your list.

1. **Do your patients know you are accepting new patients?** It seems like a silly question, but HOW do they know? Do you talk about it? It seems crazy, but because of the medical HMO model, sometimes patients assume that you might be in the same boat. If I were to show up at your office today and pull 100 charts, at random, and call them to ask, 'Did you know that Dr. So and So is welcoming new patients?' How many of them would say, 'Yes, absolutely!' It's got to start here.
2. **Does your patients' perception of your practice emulate your vision?** If you're 'busy' and have a lot of patient traffic that many times seems like controlled chaos, you are sending a conflicting message if you hope to gain referrals from your patients – especially if you run behind and leave patients waiting. Why on earth would they think to send their friends and family if the perception is that you can't take care of your existing patients effectively by honoring their time?
3. **Don't wait for a compliment.** Whenever I ask team members how they go about asking for referrals, most say, 'When a patient compliments us, I ask them to keep us in mind if they have any friends or family members that need a good dentist'. Why are we waiting for patients to verbally compliment us? Is it not a compliment that they choose you as their dental caregivers and show up in your office every 6 months?
4. **Make it personal –part of your natural conversation.** You already know what circles your patients run in. Do they play golf each week? Are they part of a Bunco group? Work at a hospital? Part of an organization in your community? Just ask! 'Mrs. Jones, who do you know at work that needs a good dentist?' or 'Bob, why don't we get to see your wife?'

5. **When is the best time to ask for a referral?** We traditionally have asked for referrals after a patient completes a big case. Honestly, they are glad to be finished and probably don't give you or your practice much thought after they walk out of your front door. Why not ask for referrals while patients are in the midst of treatment, or at the new patient visit? Those are the two times patients are most likely to be talking about you to their friends, family and co-workers.
6. **Are you on your patients' radar?** We assume our patients think about us as much as we think about them. The truth of the matter is that they only think about us twice a year, at the most, when they have to come in to get their teeth cleaned. Are you creating something exciting for your patients to be a part of? Do they get correspondence from you (other than a bill) on a regular basis via email, text and social media? If they don't hear from you, they won't think about you. And if they aren't thinking about you, they aren't going to refer to you.