



also make them aware of the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience and the cumulative results of fellow patients. We all feel reassured when we buy something on Amazon if 50-plus purchasers have previously bought it and are happy with it. Dentistry is no different.

If you'd rather use paper, then keep the form simple to encourage patients to fill it in. A star rating system from 1 to 5 is all you need. An anonymous comments box is also a good idea.

Despite the ease of technology, some patients will prefer the 'old fashioned' approach of being asked about their experience. Don't dismiss it, but do act on any negative feedback and formalise an internal procedure so that the whole team can review feedback. It is also an idea to define feedback (treatment v customer service) so that you know what area needs refinement or reward!

You might also want to review the demographics of the feedback. Your older patients, for example, might be happy with your service, whereas younger groups may view your admin as a little antiquated. Don't dismiss your paediatric patients either – they are your future! A particularly nervous little boy in our practice was always put at ease by the fact that I knew how his football team had performed at the weekend. All it took was a quick internet search before he arrived, and I immediately had a topic of conversation to engage him. How did I know he liked football? He commented on a feedback form that he liked our dentist as he was a Manchester United supporter!

When devising a questionnaire, you need to ensure you're compliant with CQC and GDC standards (I advise you go onto

the website for each organisation to check).

Whilst positive feedback is great to receive, negative feedback is a bitter pill to swallow. Don't ignore it – use it as a tool to improve. Addressing negative feedback does not need to be a negative process. If you receive negative feedback in person, listen to the comments and empathise with the patient. Generally, it's better to follow up a complaint rather than try to handle it there and then. This gives you time to think, assess and calmly formulate a response. Hard as it may seem, do thank them for their feedback. If the negative feedback is online, remember to never discuss any clinical cases due to patient confidentiality. Keep responses polite and concise. You can

generally tell if someone is 'having a rant' – you don't want fuel the fire by responding in a curt fashion or appear petty or aloof. The only time I recommend you challenge the complaint is if you feel they have the wrong practice (which is not uncommon) but do consider data protection. Remember, negative feedback isn't necessarily a formal complaint but treat it as though it is – as the next one might be!

Dental marketing and patient reviews

Shaz Memon is the creative director of Digimax and Digimax Dental. He says: 'Reviews, referrals and testimonials are powerful marketing tools. Invite feedback from your happy patients to boost the number of positive online comments about your business. Statistics suggest 97% of consumers are likely to read online reviews before settling on a local business. Regularly monitor your rating on Google. With patients chiefly concerned with quality of care, affordability and convenience, make sure you deliver on these areas. If your practice is particularly strong in any sector, shout about it on social media. Be sure to handle any disgruntled patients sensitively and react to their online posts immediately and professionally with a positive approach. Good complaints handling has been known to change around a negative viewpoint. Also, ensure that the whole team understands your dental marketing strategy, is encouraged to share the "good news" and knows to invite patient feedback. Effective team training is the backbone of any successful practice and marketing is no exception. Tailor your dental marketing plan to meet the needs of your patients – lapsed or otherwise – and ensure there is consistency in your key messages. Educate, entertain and engage long-forgotten patients using unique and valuable content on your website, via social media posts and in email marketing campaigns. Keep it coming – and so will they!'

