



Do your premises help or hinder?

How patients can be confused by your environment.

By Anne Levitch, B.Ind.Des, FDIA, AIMM

John and Peter went through university together and always enjoyed their yearly catch up to keep in touch and compare notes. They'd recently chosen different paths in their professional practice. John is aging prematurely, showing signs of stress and at times struggling financially. Peter is taking more time off, yet invested more in his practice and continues to enjoy his clinical work and professional development. Let's explore some reasons why...

John's practice is upstairs above neighbourhood shops. A long narrow tenancy with little natural light. Patients can hear the noise of the drill and whine of the suction motor while waiting. Some fluoro lights in the waiting area are either blown or flickering. Magazines are stacked up in a crooked pile, with ripped and dog-eared covers. A small fish-tank sits in one corner and a battered old toybox in the other. Some chairs have stains on the upholstery and the one near the reception desk is frayed and crooked.

A dying plant sits on the edge of the high grey laminate reception desk which hides the receptionist. Photocopied notices are stuck to the face with tape. Every word of the conversation between the receptionist and the outgoing patient can be heard.

On the way to the surgery, the patient sees the toilet pan and grubby lab bench.

In the surgery, they see cables, an old poster of teeth taped to the wall with a tear in the corner. When they lie back they look at chipped ceiling tiles and old water stains. On examination, they need a lot of dental work. John gives them a quote and they say they will get back to him. He never sees them again. That investment in time is wasted.

Peter has been working in new premises for a year. He really enjoys coming to work now and feels proud when he enters the practice. His staff are relaxed and have risen to give their best. His first patient is there, with a glass of water and new magazine in hand, chatting warmly with the receptionist about the new practice. When called to the surgery, they put the magazine back in the lit rack on their way. Waiting for a couple of minutes, they are content noting the familiar features in an artwork of a local beach. When Peter enters, they are cheerful and after a quick chat he asks

what channel they would like to watch on the ceiling-mounted screen before he starts the examination.

Sitting them up, he shows them on screen the work he recommends to keep their teeth in top shape. They check their appearance in the courtesy mirror before they reach the consult room, where the PM is printing out the treatment proposed with pricing and has it in a branded folder for them as they take a seat. She runs through each item and sets up the DVD on the specific procedure so they can understand the work involved. They decide to accept the treatment plan and before leaving, make the next appointment and discuss the payment plan proposed.

Meanwhile, Peter has slipped into his office and called his wife re



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dinner plans. Next patient is in the adjoining surgery and he is keen to get started on their substantial treatment plan. After lunch, Peter interviews a new practitioner, who made contact with him, saying they would love to work in the practice if there is an opening.

Peter's days are fuller than ever, yet after his last patient he is not as tired as he used to be. The practice is growing and the staff are more efficient, productive and happy.

It takes faith, finance and fortitude to honour your patients and offer your best. The return on investment can be substantial. The difficulty as always is taking the first step.

About the author

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