

How to get the best ROI on your healthcare practice

By **Dean Arnot**, Levitch Design Australia

We very often hear from practitioners that, "It doesn't matter what my practice looks like, I have a full appointment book." Unfortunately, they are blind to the negative effects and unnecessary stress created by this mindset. I have seen some practices which are almost third world, yet the practitioner lives in a well-planned and presented, beautiful home. The anomaly continues to surprise us, as most of us spend more time at work than at home. Doesn't it make sense to care for patients, staff and ourselves in providing the best practice environment we can?

We are not talking about opulence here, just good planning, good design and a duty of care. Perhaps an analogy could help. Getting ready for a first date, one generally wants to make a good impression. It creates more chance of a successful outcome if we present well. This includes our clothing and footwear, our hairstyle, personal hygiene, punctuality, ease of interaction, level of interest in the other, ability to communicate etc. We invest in having the power to control the outcome ... bluntly, it is better to be wanted than dumped.

Attracting a new patient, and keeping an existing patient should be thought of in the same way. It is just like a first date turning into a long term satisfying relationship, with every single patient on the books. If a practice is not 'dressed' well, is unclean, disorganised, looking a bit shabby and worse for wear, the first 'date' with a new patient, or continuing dates with an existing patient will mean the practitioner will have to work very hard to overcome the subconscious message and keep the patient; a higher chance of being the 'dumped' in this environment. Let's look at the concept of congruency.

Patients are mostly unaware of the standard of clinical treatment. They make their value judgement on the quality of work by appearance of the end-result and comfort during treatment. There are other influencing factors mostly outside of the treatment itself:

- ◆ The ease of getting to the practice
- ◆ The greeting by the receptionist
- ◆ The waiting room environment
- ◆ The comforts offered in the waiting room
- ◆ The clinical environment and what they see on the way to the treatment room
- ◆ The punctuality
- ◆ The noise levels
- ◆ The lighting levels
- ◆ The care of clinical staff etc ...

So many subconscious clues to their perception! If the practice environment is incongruent with the standard of healthcare being promoted /offered, they will be mistrustful of the practitioner. Patients notice attention to detail. They can relax and place themselves in care more readily if they perceive that there is care about detail. Never underrate the power of the subconscious response of patients in this area. Eye for detail is communicated best in the practice environment. They are informed of aesthetic sensitivity by the aesthetic presentation of a practice. A practitioner needs to demonstrate competence in both the art and science of treatment. Patient perception is critical to the success of any practice. Perception is literally in the eye of the beholder.



They perceive the level of service on offer and make judgement accordingly. The major advantage of positive perception is the influence on treatment plan acceptance.

In an environment which creates positive perception, a patient will far more readily accept your advice and treatment plan. This has a major impact on the bottom-line of a practice with substantial return on investment. It puts a practitioner in the drivers' seat of the practitioner/patient relationship and contributes to a satisfying long-term relationship.

There is another major advantage of investing in the presentation of a practice. There is substantial return on investment from staff productivity. Firstly, good staff are attracted to the practice, a major benefit in times of staff shortages. Applicants will be keen to work in a well-presented practice.

Secondly, in a well-planned practice, staff efficiency is improved. The administrative and clinical flow should be operating at peak efficiency, which reduces stress levels and improves staff productivity. It also contributes to the sense of community among the staff.

Thirdly, we have received many reports from staff after relocating to a new practice environment that they have reported a change in attitude to their job and have pride in their new practice environment. They have 'risen' to offer their best to practitioner, patients and other staff members. This is a priceless benefit.

In summary, of course, there can be substantial expense to provide a well-planned and presented practice. However, like all good investments, the return is greater than the cost. Staff efficiency and productivity are priceless benefits. Also, a very high level of patient loyalty and increased treatment plan acceptance will bring handsome rewards to the practitioner who invests in the optimum planning and presentation of a practice. The old adage, 'we reap what we sow' was never more appropriate. ◆

For more information, visit the company website at www.levitch.com.au