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PATIENT EDUCATION & TREATMENT PRESENTATION USING DENTAL PHOTOGRAPHY

One of the many uses of digital dental photography is patient education, communication and case presentation. While there are numerous uses and advantages of using photography in the dental practice, one of the key advantages is educating our patients so they may understand various treatment options and be involved in treatment planning of their own dentition. A verbal explanation may be overwhelming or confusing; therefore, providing a pictorial explanation can ease the patient and have a more profound impact.

While explaining the various options, it is essential to have good quality photos and/or videos of examples of the proposed treatment scenarios. The old cliché, “a picture is worth a thousand words” cannot be more true in our treatment presentation efforts, as an educated and involved patient will feel well cared for and therefore more likely to accept treatment and will be an invaluable potential referral source.

WHERE CAN WE USE OUR PHOTOS?

CONSULTATIONS

The best images to use for treatment presentation are those that will show the patient similar situations to what they are presenting with. For example, if a patient is concerned with a solution to correct slight crowding, it is a good idea to present examples of porcelain veneers, invisalign or traditional orthodontics. While viewing images on an ipad or a computer screen, it is the perfect opportunity to discuss the pros and cons of each treatment modality and provides the patient the opportunity to address any questions or concerns.

It is advantageous to have a library of cases to show different types of cases, such as tetracycline staining, whitening, diastemas, gingivectomies, ceramic crowns and bridges, etc. When the patient is able to see examples of work that the dentist has personally done, patient confidence and acceptance of treatment increases. This is because they are able to see the quality of your cases, as well as have a greater understanding of your proposed treatment options. In addition to using photos of cases, it is beneficial to show illustrations to educate the patient in various procedures such as root canal therapy, TMD and periodontal disease progression.

DURING CLINICAL EXAM

The quickest and easiest way to show any issues during the clinical exam is to use an intraoral camera. This is especially useful if you have a doubtful patient, where a clear image of the issue will become immediately apparent on a computer screen and treatment options can be discussed. If there are multiple issues and you prefer to have the patient return for a comprehensive consultation to present a large treatment plan, it is a good idea to take quality pictures with a regular camera.

WHAT KIND OF PHOTOS SHOULD WE PRESENT?

It is imperative to present quality before and after images that are similar in size, exposure and composition. When your photos look professional, the perception is that your work will also be of high quality. For example, it is not a good idea to have a before picture and an after picture that is dissimilar in magnification, exposure or composition, as it can distract the viewer.

Retracted or close up photos should not be used for case presentations unless absolutely necessary to show something in particular that would require that view. Generally it is only necessary to show frontal 1:2 full smile images as well as a before and after portraits. (see fig. 1-4) These views are most useful in presenting aesthetic cases.



fig. 1-2 similar magnification and composition (frontal 1:2)



fig. 3-4 before and after portraits (requires patient consent)

When you wish to discuss treatment options while explaining the benefits of newer materials, such as ceramic crowns and onlays, it is helpful to have images that would show these materials in use in the mouth. Below are images of a PFM vs a ceramic crown (fig. 5-8) and an onlay in a patient's mouth. (fig. 9-10) These types of images immediately show the advantages of one material or procedure compared to another.



fig. 5-6 shows close up of PFM and ceramic crown



fig. 7-8 shows advantage of a ceramic vs a PFM crown



fig. 9-10 advantage of a ceramic onlay vs amalgam

PATIENT CONSENT TO USE PHOTOGRAPHS

It is essential to obtain written consent from the patient and maintain confidentiality. Generally, this is only required for full-face images, however it is a good idea to obtain consent for all photography and create a release form, which should state the intended use. This must be signed by the patient, and kept permanently in their record. Most patients are not reluctant to have their photographs taken during the course of treatment and for documentation, however might object if the images will be used in marketing such as websites, brochures or newsletters. You may have the patient check off on the consent form if they grant permission to use all images or only those that do not show their face. In any case, their desires should always be respected. It is also recommended if you email any patient images, that you use an encrypted email service.

Besides patient education, there are many other uses for dental photography in the practice. Below is a list of other uses:

- Laboratory Communication
- Legal Documentation
- Marketing (internal & external)
- Websites
- Social Media
- Newsletters
- Brochures
- Communication with Specialists
- Documentation of Progression of Treatment such as orthodontics and periodontal issues
- Pathology Monitoring
- Lecturing
- Team Training

TREATMENT EXPECTATIONS

Communication is very important when providing treatment such as aesthetic dentistry, where the results are highly subjective in nature. This field can produce ambivalent results and for this reason, photography should be used, from the time of treatment discussion and presentation, through the course of treatment. It is important that the patient understands the limitations of treatment and expects a realistic outcome; otherwise, it can lead to an unpleasant experience for the patient and clinician, and possibly litigation. For this reason, photographic documentation is important and should always be a part of the record.

Good dental photography is reflected when there is consistency in composition, exposure, and magnification. While it can be overwhelming with all the settings the camera is capable of, we only need to remember two or three settings. The only time you will alter them is for close-ups and portraits. All of your smile and retracted photos should be the same setting. It is important to routinely take the same views for cosmetic cases. For example, if you take a full smile 1:2 image and a portrait at a certain distance and angle, you should make sure you take similar images for the after images, this way they will look similar and professional. (see fig. 3-4 and fig. 7-8).

The information in this article is simple and seems obvious to the majority of clinicians, however, it should be stressed that mastering photography in your practice will benefit your patients and the practice as a whole. By investing some time to learn proper photographic techniques and building a library of cases, you will be able to educate your patients as to the procedures that are beneficial to them, while boosting confidence and increasing patient acceptance of your treatment plans.

"Photography, as a powerful medium of expression and communication, offers an infinite variety of perception, interpretation and execution."



Ansel Adams