

“Branding” Your Practice: Ethics and Excellence

I recently attended a meeting of invited “opinion leaders” in dentistry, which began with an in-depth discussion and review of the various vehicles of social media and how they can be optimized to “brand” your practice. Significant time was spent reviewing the importance of having an up-to-date Web page, a notable presence in Facebook, and of course, active participation in Twitter. The young guys in practice who were in attendance were, quite frankly, amazing in their knowledge of these media vehicles. Several shared their own experiences and expressed the widely held opinion that keeping abreast of these social media, including active participation in various dental blogs, was not only valuable but also essential in the proper marketing and promotion of their dental practices. To do any less, it appeared, would make your practice look antiquated, out of date, and just not “with it.”

The meteoric rise in the capabilities of the Internet and social media has indeed been “game changers.” Information of every type can be shared and made readily available to both prospective and current patients. Web links can be incorporated into practice Web pages that direct patients to detailed information regarding virtually any procedure or treatment available in dentistry. Galleries and albums can provide full-color testimonials of what the dentist offers in his or her practice. Biographical information including honorary degrees, honors, and awards can be placed “front and center” as validation of the credentials of the dentist whose Web page is featured. Indeed, marketing and communication aids of this type have become important elements of a contemporary dental practice. All of these developments, in my opinion, offer wonderful opportunities for patient education and for practice information.

However, during all these discussions of how we can “brand” our practices through these technologically dynamic innovations, not once did I hear anyone talk of the importance of ethics and clinical excellence in the establishment and maintenance of an enduring practice. Technological improvements aside, a practice ultimately

is “branded” by the actions and the earned reputation of the dentist. When I look to refer a patient to a dentist in another state or town, I do not select the dentist based on how well he or she has “branded” his or her practices through his or her Web page or the social media, but rather by his or her reputation for ethical and excellent clinical care. Web pages and social media are important in attracting and informing patients, but ultimately, quality of care determines whether they will remain a devoted part of that practice.

There is no better long-term recipe for success than a practice that is truly “patient centered” and where the needs of the patient are considered over the needs of the wallet. Ultimately, clinical excellence is derived from a personal commitment to do what is right. We as individuals represent the singularly most important element in achieving clinical excellence and a properly “branded” practice.

As I have noted in previous editorials, Dr. Clifford Sturdevant, one of the “old masters” of operative dentistry, kept a brass plaque on his desk that was inscribed with these words: “If it’s almost right, it’s wrong!” Perhaps in a real-world sense, this may not always be the case. But it does underscore the importance of personal vigilance in striving to do things the right way. Personal satisfaction and rewards grow from it, successful patient care results from it, and ethics of the highest order demand it. Advancements in Web-based technologies and social media have greatly improved our ability as dentists to communicate with our patients. However, in spite of these advances, one tenet has remained constant: only ethical behavior and clinical excellence can “brand” our practices in a manner that will ensure an enduring and successful practice of which we can be proud.

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