

The Hostess Concept

The restaurant business adopted the “hostess concept” idea long ago and it has been very successful. *Why are we waiting?*

I practice dentistry in the office that I founded 10 years ago. At that time, it had the “open-concept” lobby and reception area. The one thing that bothered me more as the years went by was to see a new patient standing there



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waiting to be acknowledged while the front-office team members checked out other patients and answered the phone as they simultaneously attempted to give the new patient that “welcome” feeling. To me, the time that passed while the patient waited seemed like an eternity.

I realized that answering the phones, checking patients in and out, and answering dental questions at the same time was more than enough for my front team members to handle. This is when the idea of incorporating a “patient hostess” came to me. In 2006, I was designing a new, 4,500-square-foot, state-of-the-art dental office. I decided to create a desk near the front door where my patient hostess could stand and check in all patients via the use of the Dentrix Appointment Schedule. This now allows the assistants in the operatories to know the status of each arrival and to prepare to seat the patient.

The patient hostess greets the patients, checks them in via computer, and then seats them in the appropriate lobby seating area. I have two areas — one next to the game room for patients with children and families, and the other a little farther away for those who wish to enjoy a little relaxation and peace before their appointments. Once the patients are seated, my hostess offers them a refreshment of coffee, tea, juice, or bottled water.

Here are a few examples of some of my patient hostess’s responsibilities:

- ▲ Greets patients as soon as they come in the door, checks them in, and hangs their coats, if desired, in our coat room.
- ▲ Guides patients to the appropriate lobby and offers them a refreshment.
- ▲ Gives patients the forms to update their medical histories if needed.
- ▲ Gives new patients all required forms for completion.
- ▲ Informs the assistants that their patients are here.
- ▲ Keeps the lobbies, game room, restroom, juice bar, and reception areas clean and stocked at all times.
- ▲ Turns lobby television on for patients if they wish.
- ▲ Informs patients that wireless Internet is offered for their convenience.

We have been utilizing the “hostess” concept for one year now, and it has been a great experience. More attention is given to new patients, and existing patients have enjoyed the extra attention. It gives a great first impression to new patients, and it puts less stress on my front team members. This allows them to give more complete care to the patients in treatment rooms, on the phone, and at checkout.

All of this has resulted in an office with an easier flow. Everyone knows their roles once the patient hostess greets and seats. She has also been beneficial in answering questions from patient “walk-ins” who come to get information about our practice.

My vision was to have a high level of customer service to go hand in hand with the high level of excellence in clinical care we give to our patients. I wanted to change to a “guest-ology philosophy” and, therefore, created this position of “patient hostess.” The hostess position is, in essence, a combination of the hostess at a restaurant and the concierge at a hotel, being certain to attend to whatever needs the patients may have. **DE**

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