

Get Some Survey Savvy

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Something we hear a lot about these days is the importance of keeping in touch with our customers, a/k/a, our patients. Some dental offices are trying patient surveys. That's a good idea, as long as your money isn't being tossed out the window, AND that you are getting reliable information.

Once you have decided to implement patient surveys, the next decision is whether to do it yourself or hire an expert. Here are 3 important questions to help decide whether to outsource the project or do it yourself. We can summarize by thinking of Why, How and Who.

1. Why do you want get feedback from your patients? Really. If it's merely to keep in touch with patients, there are better ways. If it's to assess patient perceptions about your practice, you'll want to ask more than two or three satisfaction questions. If you are facing a troublesome problem, you want to be sure your questions are well worded to get appropriate answers.
2. How should your survey be designed? Maybe a brief telephone survey will be the most effective. Perhaps you are considering a postcard with a few relevant questions. But if only a few patients mail them back, you don't want to put much stock in such a limited view.
3. Who should administer your survey? Do you and/or your staff have enough time, talent and the technology to do a good job? One thing about information – it needs to be correct and reliable if it's to help you make good assessments or decisions. Poor design can yield unreliable data, which means the information you get from your data may be suspect, or even wrong.

Some closing thoughts: If you want honest answers, make sure the survey is anonymous, no names, tracking numbers or other patient identifiable information. You are more likely to get honest feedback if patients know they are not sending their answers directly back to you. So, again, why do you want to contact your patients and what do you hope to learn? A research professional can help you with all these questions, and more that will come up during your initial discussion.