

# Aligning expectation with reality

CLINICAL  
TIPS

An increasingly informed patient population presents opportunities – as well as challenges – warns **Nishan Dixit**

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We have created a culture where people are increasingly under pressure to emulate their idols, take the perfect selfie and cultivate an idyllic social media profile.

As such, there is significant demand for cosmetic dentistry, with many patients aspiring to perfect their smile – and knowing exactly what they want in order to do this. The level of oral health information that is now at everyone's fingertips means that, without a doubt, patients will have certain expectations of their dental treatment.

Now, more than ever, it is important that dentists are managing these expectations in relation to what patients find online.

Due to the nature of cosmetic dental procedures being elective with a focus on improving smile aesthetics, the majority of patients seeking out this type of service will come to your practice with a preconceived idea of what to expect from the process.

Some patient expectations will be realistic but others will not, which can pose challenges for the dental team. Where patients anticipate too much or are not properly informed of the potential result, their expectations are less likely to be met.

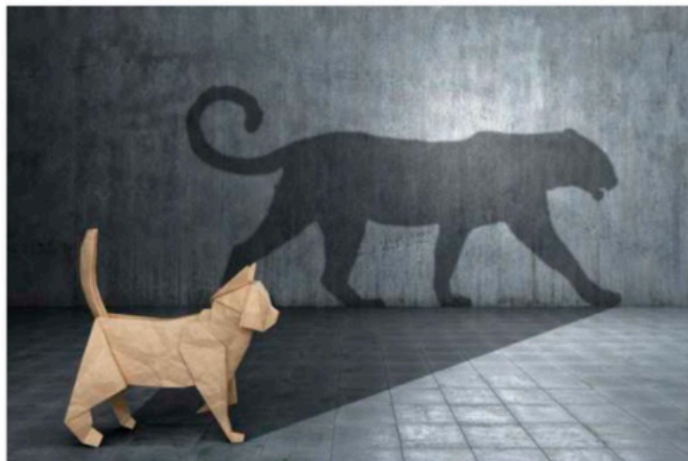
The chances of the patient feeling dissatisfied with treatment will therefore be higher, increasing the risk of a complaint.

## A matter of trust

Patients' expectations must be effectively managed throughout treatment to reduce the likelihood of a poor outcome.

This begins with allocating plenty of discussion time during each appointment to ensure that patients fully understand and appreciate what's involved with their treatment and the commitment they are making.

It is important to have an open and honest conversation that involves the patient explaining their smile aspirations and how they hope treatment will help them achieve these goals.



Don't underestimate the value of establishing good rapport and a professional relationship with patients, as this can go a long way to gaining patients' trust and, consequently, enhancing their treatment experience.

Take the time to explain all the possible treatment solutions with the patient – including the option of no treatment – taking into account the costs, recovery time and limitations of each procedure.

Before consent is provided for any treatment to commence, patients need to understand what will happen and the potential risks, side effects and complications that they might experience, including any pain or discomfort. It is essential that the patient is given the chance to ask questions or seek clarification on anything that is discussed.

In some cases, it can be useful to ask the patient to repeat what you have explained as a means of ensuring that they are fully aware of what treatment entails.

## Space, mindfulness and clarity

Good communication is essential in this case, so I always tailor my language and the information provided to each individual patient. Moreover, I give patients the space and time to properly digest and reflect on the options presented in order to encourage more informed decision-making.

Using clear, simple terms and avoiding technical jargon wherever possible can help patients' understanding of the treatment process, so that they develop a realistic idea of what to expect.

If a patient attends the practice and requests a particular type of procedure, it is vital to be especially mindful of that patient's expected outcome, as it might be unachievable. In which case, a more suitable treatment option would have to be recommended.

In every situation, consider whether it is in the patient's best interest to proceed with the requested treatment or whether a different option should be suggested

if you believe they are unable or unwilling to comply with your advice.

Being aware of potential differences in perspectives can help in enabling you to anticipate any concerns patients have and prevent them from becoming an issue later on down the treatment road. If you are ever in doubt, you can always refer the patient for a second opinion or seek advice from your peers, who may be able to support you in further demonstrating to patients what can and cannot be achieved with treatment.

## Tailored treatment

Transparency is at the heart of managing patient expectations, which begins and ends with good communication.

Every patient is unique and will, therefore, have different ideas of what they want to achieve with their smile. Dental professionals must be as open and honest as possible about the treatment journey so that patients understand their options and fully engage with the planning process for a more collaborative approach.

This can help promote improved patient confidence and trust in the care you provide, thereby ensuring the desired result is achieved. Treatment will ultimately be a more rewarding experience for you, your team and the patient if expectations are effectively managed from the start. **D**