

Tips for Dental Practice staff – How to make a trip to the dentist easier for someone who has difficulty understanding

Prior to the appointment

1. When they phone to book
 - Point out accessibility information and direct them to the practice website.
 - Tell the person on the phone who they will be seeing and who they can expect to see when they visit (usually the first face they see is the receptionist).
 - Having an up to date website with photos of the staff can be very useful.
2. Consider sending all paper work to the person or their representative before the appointment in order to reduce stress and a lengthy check-in process when the person arrives.
 - the medical history and medication list request
 - information about consent and any evidence such as power of attorney and advanced decisions
 - information about who is eligible for free dental treatments and the cost for those who are not. The patient/carer can ensure they have the correct funds on them or the exemption evidence. Information can be printed from <https://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1781.aspx?CategoryID=74>

During the appointment

3. Try to put on your PPE once you are ready to start treatment rather than before the patient has entered the room. Wearing PPE can be disconcerting and make it harder for the patient to understand what you are saying.
4. The dental chair can be very frightening for some patients and they can feel like they are going to fall out when the chair is moving. Tell the patient the chair will move and make a noise. Perhaps demonstrate this before the patient is in the chair so they can see it. Try to avoid sudden movements of the chair.
5. People with dementia may find mirrors and shiny surfaces distressing so try using only small hand mirrors and images to describe treatment.
6. Use the decision making flow chart if you have any questions about a patient's ability to make an informed decision. Pictures can help to explain what you plan to do.
7. Even if you feel a patient and the carer have understood the treatment plan give them information to take away. This may be added to a care plan or used to familiarise themselves again or share with other carers and family members. It may be useful to signpost them on to useful websites and printed materials such as <https://bda.org/public/brushing-top-tips-for-your-patients>

After the appointment

8. Making a note of anything that helped will be of assistance in future appointments
9. Ensure that you clearly record the decision making processes used including how you gained consent.