

AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR THE DENTAL TEAM

BEYOND COVID-19

Returning to practice: a patient-first approach to recovery

INTRODUCTION

Who should read this?

All members of your Dental team.



Before use, please review the Disclaimer on the back cover of this document.

The dental industry is facing huge challenges in these unprecedented times. Many dental professionals are understandably concerned about the financial impact of COVID-19 and whether their Practice will survive, the longer this pandemic continues. It is critical, therefore, that dental professionals use this time effectively to prepare for the 'Return to Practice' phase when they reopen and welcome back their patients.

To this end, **REGENERATE™ Enamel Science** and **Dr Ben Atkins, President of the Oral Health Foundation**, have combined their collective experience to create this guide to help dental teams navigate some of the challenges ahead. It outlines a patient-centric path to recovery and introduces the concept of the 'Dental Diary Dilemma' – the imminent challenge of scheduling appointments to optimum capacity when so many patients will be consumed with anxiety and concerns for their own safety for some time to come.

Our '**Return to Practice' communication framework** contains constructive and practical tips to help dental teams reconnect with their patients, whilst allaying patient fears in the process.

The consequences of not planning for this 'Dental Diary Dilemma' could delay recovery and have significant financial implications for practices and clinics around the world, potentially putting their very survival into question. By implementing some of these measures, adopting a more patient-centric approach to recovery, we are confident dental professionals will feel more positive about the future.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS GUIDE

- 1 To reassure you that dentistry is well placed to manage itself in a COVID-19 world
- 2 To set out a 'patient focused' route to recovery for every Dental Practice
- 3 To provide a simple communication framework which you can act on NOW to help speed recovery



A new mindset

PART ONE: THE PATH TO RECOVERY



01

THE PATH
TO RECOVERY



02

THE “DENTAL
DIARY DILEMMA”

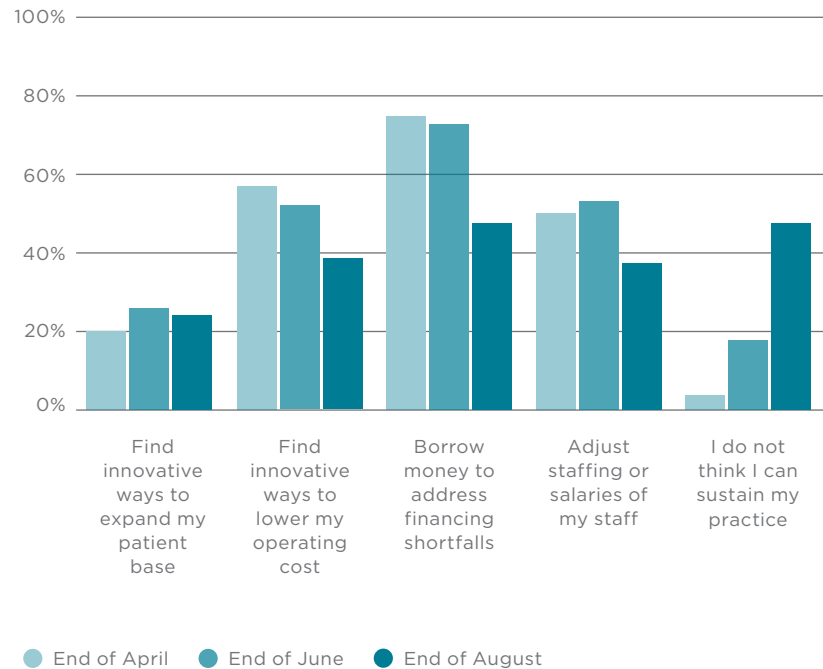


03

RETURN TO PRACTICE
FRAMEWORK

FINANCIAL IMPACT OF COVID-19

WHAT DENTISTS WILL DO IF CURRENT RESTRICTIONS LAST UNTIL



SOURCE: ADA Health Policy Institute

- Unprecedented decline in revenues.
- But unlike other sectors, much of this loss is a **deferral** of income:
 - Mounting backlog of patients
 - Delayed treatment may intensify demand
- But the longer restrictions last, the more perilous it will be.

How dental teams respond and manage their path to recovery is paramount.

DENTAL TEAMS NEED TO THINK AND ACT ACROSS 5 HORIZONS

McKinsey have identified 5 horizons which businesses need to fully consider during the pandemic. It's a useful model because it helps to frame the variety of issues which need addressing into distinct phases.

We will now review how these horizons apply specifically to the dental profession...



RESOLVE HORIZON

Immediate response to crisis

Most Practices will have closed their doors, limiting services to emergency dental treatments or redeploying resources to support hospitals on the front line. Accepting the inevitability of the crisis and winding down operations are the order of the day here.



RESOLVE

- Practice closure
- Protecting or supporting workforce
- Emergency-only procedures (if at all)
- Clinicians redeployed to frontline



RESILIENCE



RETURN



REIMAGINE



REFORM

RESILIENCE HORIZON

Measures to build resilience in lockdown

Here we focus on managing cashflows, reducing operating costs, managing supply chain, securing loans and living more frugally to protect limited cash reserves. With more free time to spare, it's also an opportunity to do general housekeeping or upskill in key areas.



RESOLVE



RESILIENCE

- Managing cash flow
- Stripping out any non-essential bills/costs
- Protecting cash reserves
- Housekeeping
- Upskilling



RETURN



REIMAGINE



REFORM

RETURN HORIZON

Preparations for when social restrictions are eased

This is about planning and preparing for when restrictions are lifted so that you can restore operations, begin practicing and welcoming back patients. Think about patient communications, not just operational measures and safety protocols.



RESOLVE



RESILIENCE



RETURN

- Proactive or reactive planning
- Managing patient population and bookings
- Looking at new safety protocols
- Reinstating staff, making best use of workforce



REIMAGINE



REFORM

FOCUS OF THIS GUIDE

REIMAGINE HORIZON

Exploring new opportunities to reinvent practice

Dental teams will need to imagine what the “*New Normal*” will look like in their respective fields. This involves spotting vulnerabilities in your existing business offering and reinventing services or experiences to serve emerging patient needs post-COVID-19.



RESOLVE



RESILIENCE



RETURN



REIMAGINE

- Looking beyond the immediate future
- Spotting vulnerabilities but also opportunities to reinvent services or experiences to serve emerging needs



REFORM

REFORM HORIZON

Adapting to the New Normal

This horizon looks at the new protocols and regulatory standards which you may need to put in place to ensure patient safety. This might include investment in PPE, upgrading specific dental tools and equipment, conducting or accessing virus or antibody test results and new training.



RESOLVE



RESILIENCE



RETURN



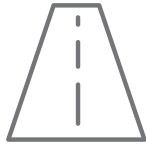
REIMAGINE



REFORM

- New protocols and standards which may be introduced
- E.g. PPE requirements, tools/ equipment, testing, training

PART TWO: THE DENTAL DIARY DILEMMA



01

THE PATH
TO RECOVERY



02

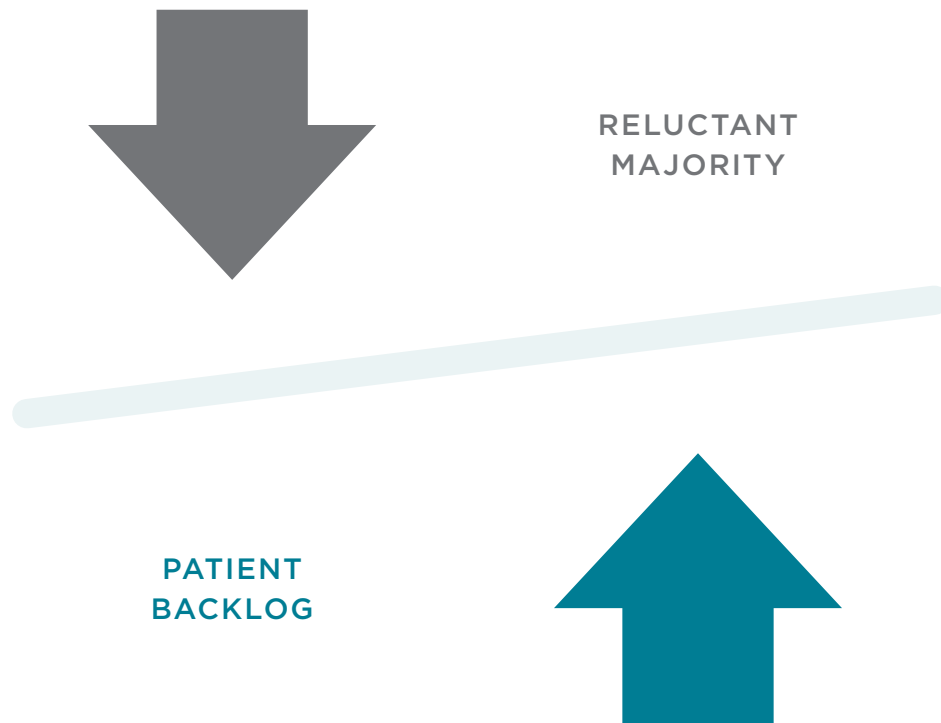
THE “DENTAL
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03

RETURN TO PRACTICE
FRAMEWORK

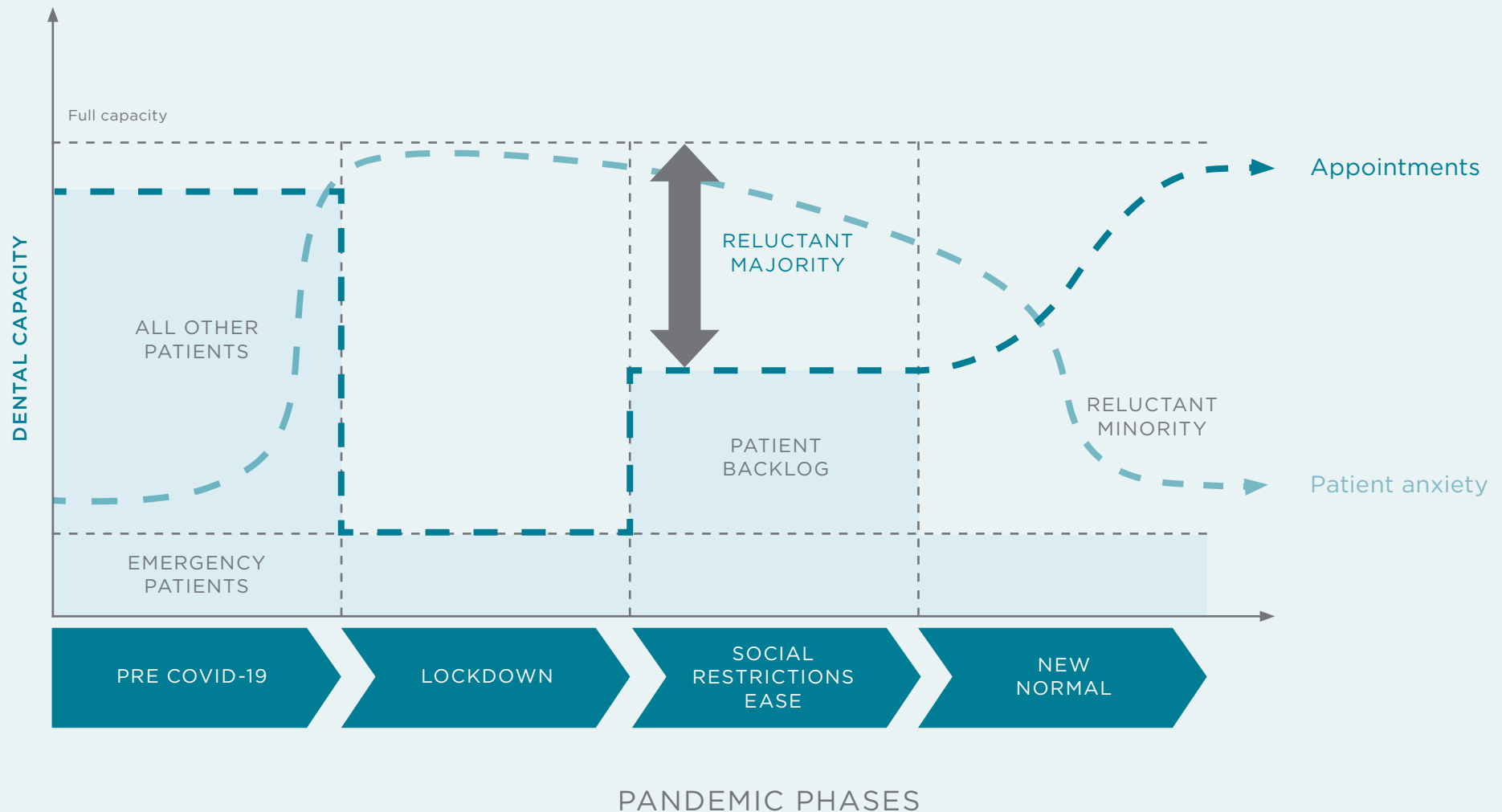
THE DENTAL DIARY DILEMMA



OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE IS BALANCING A BACKLOG OF APPOINTMENTS WITH A PATIENT POPULATION RELUCTANT TO COME BACK INTO A HEALTHCARE SETTING, ESPECIALLY DENTISTRY.

WE MUST CONVINCING THE RELUCTANT MAJORITY

To illustrate this point, our hypothetical graph below maps dental capacity against each phase of the pandemic. You can see the peaks and troughs of appointments inversely correlate with patient anxiety. Whilst managing the backlog in the short term will provide some reprieve, the key to unlocking a speedy recovery is convincing the Reluctant Majority it's safe to return once social restrictions ease.



EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS HYPOTHESIS

Many patients avoid dentists at the best of times, so it's perhaps not surprising that their reluctance will be accentuated by Coronavirus.

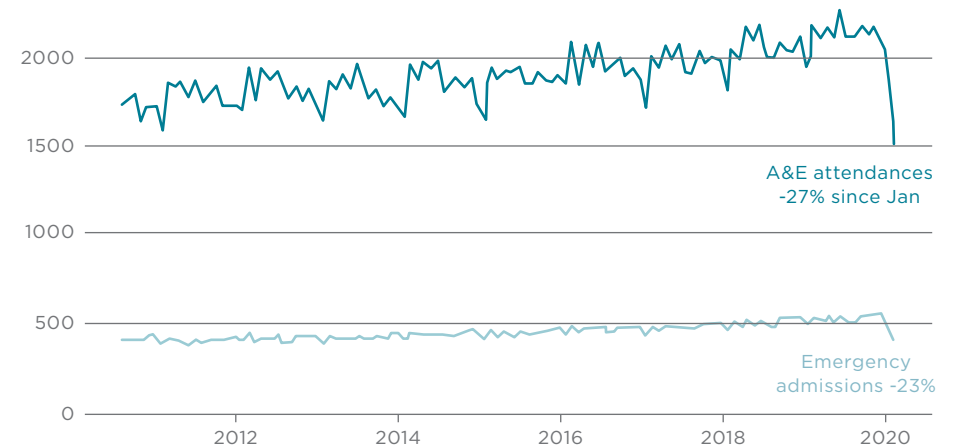
According to Dentistry.co.uk, they share this view and believe many dental patients will not return immediately due to safety concerns. There are even concerning reports in the press and from the BDA of patients unable to access care, so take matters into their own hands.

We anticipate patient readiness to return to dental clinics will mirror what is already happening in other health services. For example, despite a surge in COVID-19 admissions, overall hospital footfall in UK has fallen by 80% (Source: Oxford University).

GPs may still be open for business, but their receptions are eerily empty. This reluctance to visit GPs is impacting the whole diagnostic pathway and likely to put added strain on health services in the longer term. The same knock on effect could be applied to dentistry.

Likewise, the number of urgent referrals in UK has dropped to around 25% of usual levels (source: Scienceblog). The UK is also seeing the biggest drop on record in A & E attendance and Emergency Admissions due to public concern with catching the virus (Source: Telegraph).

A&E ATTENDANCES AT LOWEST LEVELS SINCE RECORDS BEGAN



Total admissions and attendances at A&E departments in England

INACTION IS NOT AN OPTION

To ensure you and your dental team make the recovery as fast and as inexpensive as possible, you must engage with and manage the 'Dental Diary Dilemma'.

It goes without saying, the longer it takes to resume a New Normal, the more strain it will place on diminishing cash reserves and your ability to stay in business. In fact, according to BDA survey, 1 in 5 Dental Practices in the UK already fear liquidation if the pandemic goes beyond August.

IT'S A BUSINESS IMPERATIVE
TO PUT MEASURES IN PLACE
NOW SO THAT WHEN YOUR
DOORS DO EVENTUALLY
REOPEN FOR BUSINESS,
YOU HAVE A STEADY PIPELINE
OF PATIENT BOOKINGS
LOCKED IN THE DIARY.

PART THREE: THE “RETURN TO PRACTICE” FRAMEWORK



01

THE PATH
TO RECOVERY



02

THE “DENTAL
DIARY DILEMMA”



03

RETURN TO PRACTICE
FRAMEWORK

THE “RETURN TO PRACTICE” FRAMEWORK

A simple communication framework which will help you reconnect with your patients so that they return to practice quickly.

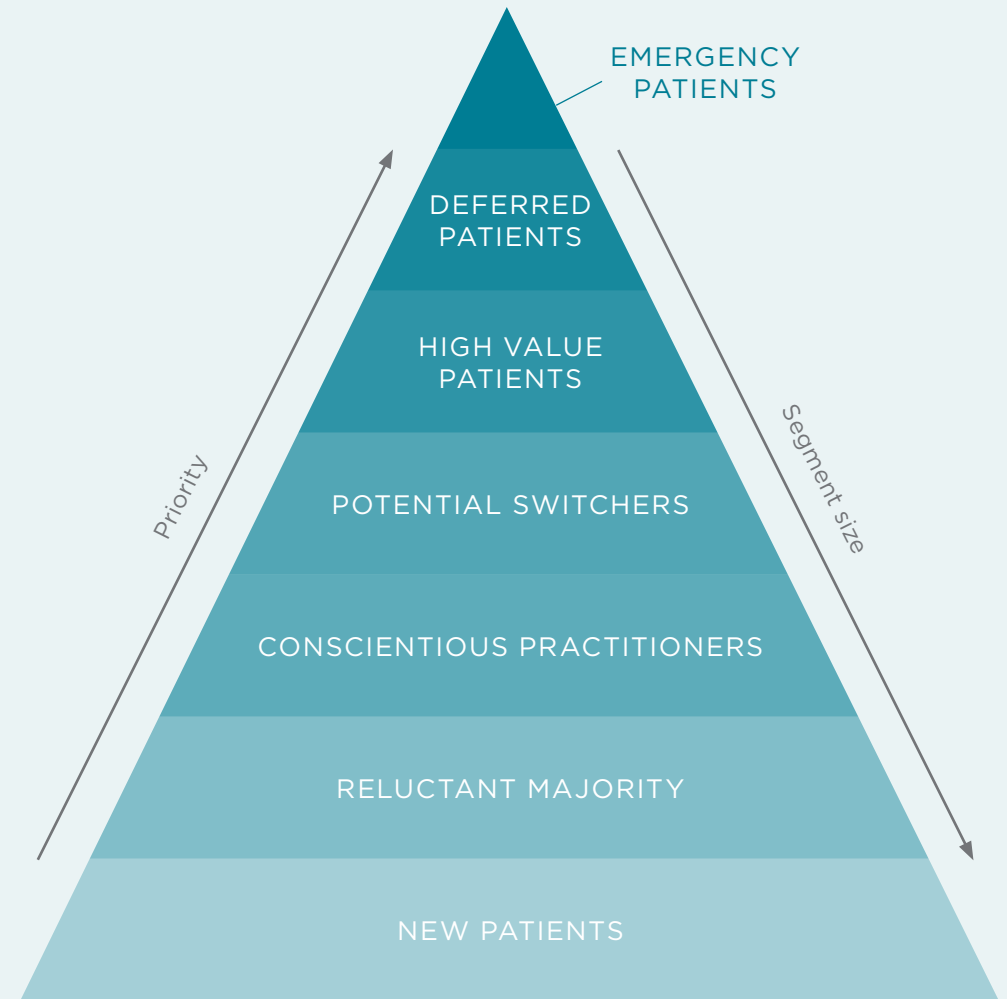


STEP 1: SEGMENT YOUR PATIENTS



Your patient population is not one homogenous group but a disparate array of individuals with different needs, mindsets and behaviours in relation to this COVID-19 crisis.

You know your patients better than anyone but this is one way to potentially segment your database.



STEP 1: SEGMENT YOUR PATIENTS



Emergency Patients should always be your first priority. They will need urgent treatment either in lock down or shortly after to relieve any pain or impacted teeth.

Deferred Patients relates to those patients who may have begun dental treatment that was suspended due to enforced COVID-19 restrictions. They will need to be managed carefully in lockdown to ensure they embrace preventative oral health measures to help prevent any deterioration. They will also need to be booked back in to complete their treatment as soon as lockdown is lifted.

High Value Patients are those who have been with your Practice for years. They have traditionally made regular check-ups, invested in private treatment or have other family members who all use the same dentist or hygienist. These are loyal patients so keep them close during lockdown.

Potential Switchers will be those patients who may have become disenfranchised with your Practice over lockdown for any number of reasons. Maybe they felt abandoned or unloved by the Practice or they become frustrated when they plan to return and find no bookings available.

Conscientious Practitioners are those who you know place high importance on oral health, visit your Hygienist and will be desperate to resume regular check-ups. They are more likely to proactively contact the Practice to book their next appointment, but it may be wise to schedule these around your other segments as these patients may be more flexible.

Reluctant Majority are probably the largest segment within your database as lockdown restrictions ease. With social distancing still in force for months to come, they will need considerable reassurance and education to convince them your Practice is a safe place to visit.

New Patients are the lifeblood for future growth of your Practice but in these uncertain times you may have to invest in advertising to offset the lag effect in other areas. You could decide to get more of the same type of patients as you already have or you may want to target new demographic profiles if you're planning to diversify your portfolio.

STEP 2: MAKE A PLAN



Once you have segmented your patient population, you need to work out the **right levers** to pull to help respond to their respective needs.



STEP 2: MAKE A PLAN

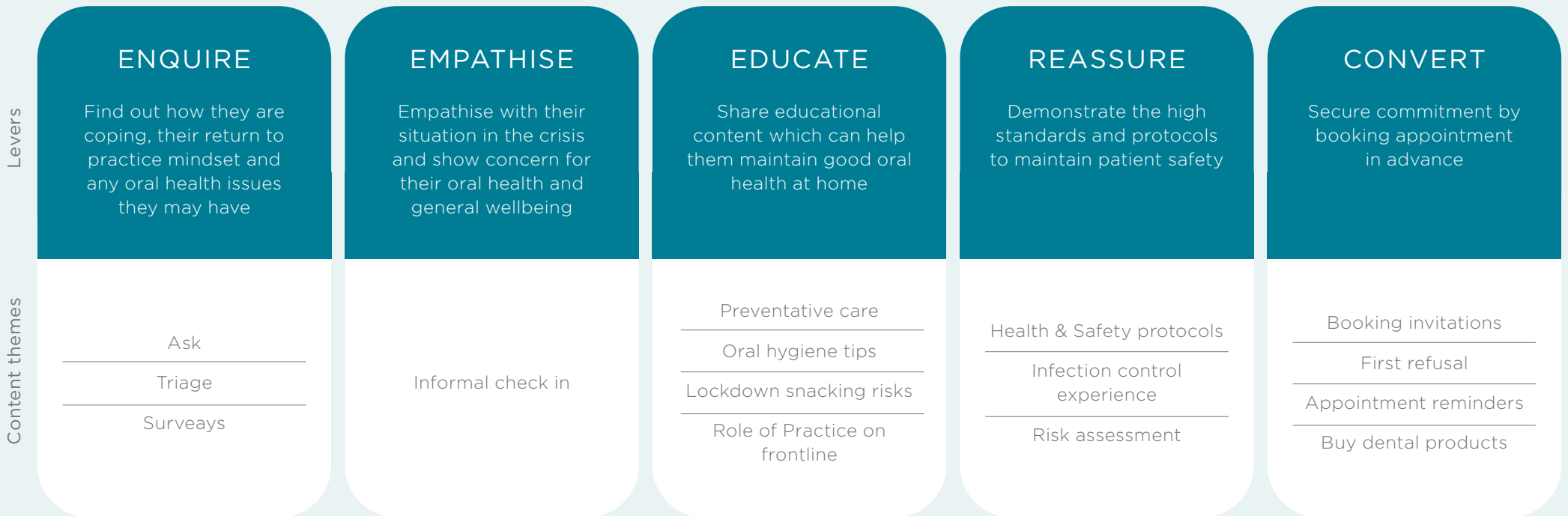
You can now start to plan how you will reconnect with each segment

| Patient Segment | Need States | Communication Task | Levers | Channels |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| EMERGENCY TREATMENTS | Seeking urgent appointment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise bookings | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. EMPATHISE 2. CONVERT | Inbound calls Website |
| DEFERRED PATIENTS | Completion of surgery or treatment when it's safe to do so | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule bookings in advance to complete treatment • Educate on preventative self-care | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ENQUIRE 2. EMPATHISE 3. EDUCATE 4. CONVERT | Outbound calls Direct Mail Email Website |
| HIGH VALUE PATIENTS | Feels undervalued or abandoned during crisis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give VIP treatment to show you value this relationship and care for their general wellbeing and oral health. • Invite them to pre-book check-ups in advance to avoid disappointment. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ENQUIRE 2. EMPATHISE 3. EDUCATE 4. REASSURE 5. CONVERT | Outbound calls Direct mail |
| POTENTIAL SWITCHERS | Disenfranchised with Practice due to lack of bookings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up when cancellations come up to accommodate booking requests | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. EMPATHISE 2. CONVERT | Email Outbound calls |
| CONSCIENTIOUS PRACTITIONERS | Keen to return to practice as soon as possible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate how to maintain oral hygiene at home • Schedule around other priority segments | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. EDUCATE 2. CONVERT | Inbound calls Email Social Blog/website |
| RELUCTANT MAJORITY | Remains unconvinced that Practice is safe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure extensive safety measures are in place • Communicate experience in dealing with infectious diseases – COVID-19 no different | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ENQUIRE 2. EMPATHISE 3. REASSURE 4. CONVERT | Social media Blog/website Email Direct mail |
| NEW PATIENTS | Seeking a new dentist in the area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote Practice, good oral hygiene and safety standards to attract new patients | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. EDUCATE 2. REASSURE 3. CONVERT | Social media Paid media Search |

STEP 3: CREATE THE RIGHT CONTENT



With a plan in place, you can now create the right content to serve each segment.



STEP 3: CREATE THE RIGHT CONTENT



ENQUIRE

Find out how they are coping, their return to practice mindset and any oral health issues they may have

Ask

Triage

Surveys

EMPATHISE

Empathise with their situation in the crisis and show concern for their oral health and general wellbeing

Informal check in

You can learn a lot from a simple phone call. **Asking** them how they feel about scheduling a check-up will help you understand their 'return to practice' mindset so that you can tailor your approach accordingly.

An **online survey** could also be used to gauge their readiness to return and help you assign responders to the right segments.

Remote triage could be an effective way of prioritising your backlog so that you schedule the most pressing patients first.

Informal check-in calls are a powerful way to demonstrate empathy. For any patients self-isolating or shielding, a casual call from their friendly dentist or hygienist could make all the difference and turn them into lifelong advocates.

STEP 3: CREATE THE RIGHT CONTENT



EDUCATE

Share educational content which can help them maintain good oral health at home

Preventative care

Oral hygiene tips

Lockdown snacking risks

Role of Practice on
frontline

With so many patients unable to access professional treatment, **oral hygiene tips** can play an important role. So think about what assets you have which can be repurposed e.g.

- How to brush properly in lockdown
- Brushing twice a day
- The importance of interdental cleaning

REGENERATE™ has produced an asset focused on patient at home oral hygiene.

For those Deferred Patients who had treatment suspended due to COVID-19, think about what **preventative care** advice you can share to help stop further decay until such time that it's safe to complete the treatment.

You could even highlight the **risks of snacking in lockdown** and the impact this could be having on their oral health.

If your Practice has played a **role on the front line**, don't be shy in letting your patients know.

STEP 3: CREATE THE RIGHT CONTENT



REASSURE

Demonstrate the high standards and protocols to maintain patient safety

Health & Safety protocols

Infection control
experience

Risk assessment

Dentistry is one of the most highly regulated industries with strict **health & safety protocols** to protect clinicians and patients. And yet your patients probably have no idea of what goes on behind the scenes.

Likewise, you already have extensive **infection control experience** to handle influenzas, SARS, HIV, hepatitis and herpes to name a few. By framing COVID-19 as just another infectious disease, might help to reassure the Reluctant Majority.

Consider creating demo videos of some of your key safety procedures e.g.

- how drills or hand pieces get cleaned and sanitized
- how ultrasonic cleaning works
- how the surgery is sanitized for 30 minutes between each appointment
- how social distancing is maintained in Practice

STEP 3: CREATE THE RIGHT CONTENT



CONVERT

Secure commitment by booking appointment in advance

Booking invitations

First refusal

Appointment reminders

Buy dental products

This is essentially any content which will ultimately drive footfall or bookings, so **booking invitations** or **appointment reminders**. For some audience segments such as Emergency or Deferred Patients you should be able to convert these relatively easily.

For your High Value Patients, why not offer them bookings on a **first refusal basis** to make them feel valued and appreciated. If they believe there will be scarce appointments due to your backlog, they might appreciate the offer to jump the queue.

For the Reluctant Majority, make sure you've laid the groundwork first so that you have allayed their fears, before following up with a conversion message.

Above all, don't wait until the restrictions have lifted; start pre-booking appointments now – you'll feel better knowing your diary is starting to get filled up again.

STEP 4: RECONNECT WITH YOUR PATIENTS



Put your plan into action by leveraging all the owned and paid media channels at your disposal so that your patients are primed to return to practice.

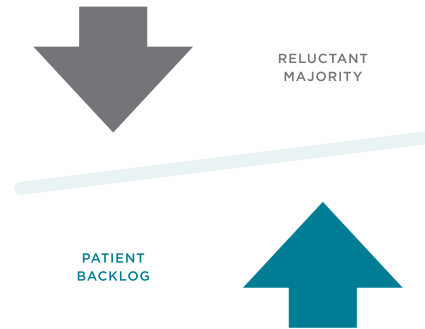


SUMMARY

DENTAL TEAMS NEED TO THINK AND ACT ACROSS 5 HORIZONS



PATH TO RECOVERY

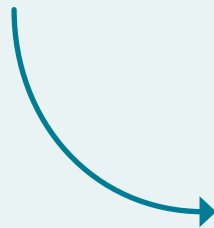


DENTAL DIARY DILEMMA

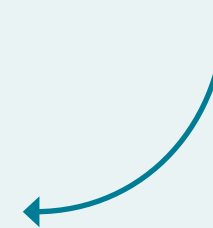
THE "RETURN TO PRACTICE" FRAMEWORK



RETURN TO PRACTICE FRAMEWORK



A new mindset



ABOUT DR BEN ATKINS

Dr Ben Atkins studied dentistry at Sheffield University, qualifying in 1998, and subsequently spent some time at Karolinska Dental Hospital, which is renowned for its restorative work.

In 2001, he bought a dental practice in Salford. This became part of the four-surgery Revive Dental Care business, which won many awards. The practice also ran an in-house Emergency dental service in Stockport and an out-of-hours service covering Merseyside/Cheshire and large proportion of Greater Manchester and Ben is proud to have worked with local homeless charities at his Homeless dental clinic, providing free dental care to those in great need.

Ben was a member of the Young Dentists Commission in 1999 and since then has been Press and Parliamentary Representative for the British Dental Association. He is the current President and media spokesperson for the Oral Health Foundation and has also been involved in various projects with NHS England & NICE.

He used to lecture at Manchester Dental School and now uses his skills to present for the companies for which he is an Ambassador including Unilever, Philips and Wrigleys.



DISCLAIMER



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