



PRIME PRACTICE  
Hygienist Communication Intensive  
new 2-day intensive course

Over the next few months, Prime Practice will be one of our guest contributors, providing a Q&A space for hygiene related queries (non-clinical).

**QUESTION:** How can I successfully communicate to the purse holder of elderly patients (or those living in Aged Care Facilities) the benefits of regular dental hygiene visits and products ?

**ANSWER:** As all hygienists know:

- If elderly people still have their teeth, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to keep up oral health. Often they are on medication and most medications that have the word 'anti' in front of them, such as anti-depressant, anti-coagulant, anti-hypertensives, will have a side effect of a lower flow of saliva. Bacteria will flourish in a dry mouth.
- The problem is much more than just an unpleasant breath. We now know that these bacterial colonies grow between the teeth and under the gum line and get into the bloodstream. The result is a higher incidence of a whole range of chronic disease such as heart conditions, stroke, diabetes complications etc.
- The other problem is that the roots of teeth do not have the protection of hard enamel. With a dry mouth we see rapid root caries and decay of teeth under the gumline. This is almost impossible to treat and will result in painful tooth decay, broken teeth, complex extractions.

Bottom line: regular professional maintenance and care is more comfortable, simpler and cheaper than dealing with the results of neglect. Elderly patients and their carers will be more motivated to avoid unpleasant outcomes than by any benefits that a hygienist can offer.

The focus of modern dentistry is overwhelmingly preventative in nature, however some hygienists still communicate in what can be viewed as a reactive way. Clearly, there is a big difference between communicating the above information to a patient when they complain about the cost of a visit, versus before any objections arise. There is certainly an advantage to delivering targeted hygiene education before - not after - the patient resists.

Also, the delivery of hygiene education can come across like a "lecture" to some patients and will, in some cases, actually trigger the very objections that we are trying to avoid! Communications mastery in the hygiene room involves finding ways of delivering graphic hygiene education in a non-threatening way such that the patient becomes internally motivated and takes true ownership of their problem.

Use of 3rd party stories and metaphors delivered in an atmosphere of relaxed dialogue, combined with showing your elderly patients pictures of the consequences of NOT having regular dental visits tends to be the best way.

WIN: Prime Practice are giving away 1 space each month to our 2-day Hygienist Communication Intensive, which is in Brisbane on 4-5 August for the best Hygiene related question emailed to [info@primepractice.com.au](mailto:info@primepractice.com.au) by the 10th of each month. For more information and to register for this course, visit [http://www.primepractice.com.au/hygienist\\_communication.php](http://www.primepractice.com.au/hygienist_communication.php)

**Hygienist Communication Intensive** is running in: Adelaide 7-8 July, Brisbane 4-5 August, Melbourne 24-25 August, Sydney 11-12 October, Perth 15-16 September. Book now to get your 10% Early Bird Discount

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