

## PRACTICE MANAGEMENT GERHARD RIEGL

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The population is shrinking and aging in most countries. What does this mean for dentists in the future?

The structure of practices will change fundamentally. Research indicates that the number of dentists is expected to remain roughly constant, but the proportion of women dentists will rise. As women often prefer part-time work without the entrepreneurial responsibility of running their own practice, I see a trend towards larger practices with contracted dentists.

The decline in the population will lead to a decrease in the number of patients per dentist. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that the competitive situation among specialists will intensify. They will have to come up with good ideas to make their business succeed. The work of the specialists will become more challenging in the future.

How can implant specialists build a viable network of referrers?

I firmly believe that specialist skills are the door opener, but human skills are the crucial success factor. Technically, the specialist has to advertise his skills through publications, invitations, circulars or referrer surveys. But the success factors are the philosophy of his practice and the chemistry of relationships. Specialist skills are required but they are not enough if the specialist really wants to stand out from the competition. In most cases, however, specialists neglect this human aspect. The real winners in my view are the specialists who build collegial relationships with their referers.

How can this be achieved?

One way is through local benchmarking. For example, the specialist writes both to his existing referrers and to potential referrers asking for their view on the standard of care, the collaboration, their degree of satisfaction with the situation, and the main factors driving their decision to refer. This forms the basis for dialogue and improvement.

What are the most important aspects behind the decision to refer a patient to the specialist?

Referring dentists generally choose their preferred specialists on the basis of just a few criteria. Above all, referrers must be sure that their patients return and do not have any negative experiences. It is important that the specialist has a unique, distinct profile and remains true to his ethical standards and his principles.

In contrast, the patients' choice is driven by whether or not they like the dentist and feel well looked after; the dentist's specialist skills are taken for granted.

Can low-price manufacturers compete with premium players when it comes to helping dentists build their practices?

Low-price manufacturers are compelled to combine their products with additional incentives, because their implants lack innovation. But innovation leaders become unbeatable if they offer the best products in conjunction with genuine partnership success programs.