

Common Questions for Financial Coordinators

“I don't know what my correct insurance is. Can you call my dentist (or mother, etc.) to find out what it is?”

You can expect to receive requests like this from patients that may seem unreasonable, but it is valuable to provide assistance rather than instinctively saying no. This will help avoid some mistakes, miscalculations, and decreased patient satisfaction.

You can either guide them through solving the problem themselves or make the accommodation when possible. A good way to approach this is to suggest that the patient take out their phone right then to ask their mother/other practitioner for the information while you're sitting with them. That way, if you can tell more help or information is needed, you can get involved. Otherwise, the situation gets resolved on the spot.

“How much does this cost?”

“That depends on a number of clinical details that we collect in your consultation, but the cost can range from \$____ to _____. You will get x-rays when you come for your consultation, and we will be able to give you more exact costs then, but we make sure our fees are competitive with other practices in the area. Let's get you scheduled!”

“How much will I owe?”

“In many cases, it is necessary to check insurance benefits and specific details before we can provide the most accurate answer. In fact, sometimes a pre-authorization is required, which can affect the eventual outcome. It's important to verify insurance and complete the necessary documentation before or at the time of the initial interaction, and we do this by gathering insurance information in the initial call and creating a system for collecting as much information as possible.”

It's important to fully educate the patient on insurance early to avoid future misunderstandings and frustrations. Detailed written information is highly encouraged but should be coupled with an initial conversation that includes the idea that insurance companies go to great lengths to avoid paying claims.

“While we've gotten pretty good over the years at maneuvering this game that insurance companies play, we really can't guarantee any particular outcome when insurance is involved. So we discuss treatment with the idea that the patient is responsible for the entire fee, and we do everything possible to help with the insurance process. But it is important to know that even well-documented information, such as co-pays, patient portions, allowable procedures, etc. are subject to change as far as the insurance company is concerned. So we're providing our very best estimate in terms of what we've researched with the insurance company, but we need to work together to ensure the patient is aware that the responsibility is his/hers. Of course, we will do all we can to maximize your benefits.”

“Why are implants so expensive?”

“Implants may seem expensive, but did you know that implants are actually one of the least expensive means of replacing teeth? That’s because other solutions like bridges and dentures have to be revisited and replaced multiple times. And they can bring about other problems, like damage to surrounding bone, teeth, and gums, which then requires more treatment. Because implants are a permanent, guaranteed solution that isolates the affected area, you save in so many ways. For this reason, I highly recommend using implants for tooth replacement when cost is a concern for the patient.”

“What is the difference between DDS and DMD?”

“DDS (Doctor of Dental Surgery) and DMD (Doctor of Dental Medicine) are equivalent degrees. Each dental school awards one of these degrees upon graduation from dental school.”

“What is your cancellation policy?”

“We require 24 hours of notice to cancel or change an appointment once made. This policy ensures that we have adequate time set aside to provide you with the best care.”

(When scheduling an appointment) “We are reserving an appointment for you—can you think of anything that would prevent you from keeping the appointment? I’m asking because we require 24 hours of notice to cancel or change an appointment once made. This policy ensures that we have adequate time to provide you and all of our patients with the best care. By making an appointment, you confirm that you are able to make the selected appointment time, but we are happy to provide courtesy calls to remind you prior to your appointment. Let me make sure we have the best contact information for you.”

“Is there an anesthesiologist?”

“There is not a separate doctor operating as a dental anesthesiologist at our practice, but that’s because our doctors meet and exceed the certification and licensing requirements to administer dental anesthesia for our patients.”

You can add additional light information about your training, residency, experience, work in hospitals, the approach to anesthesia with your trauma patients, etc., if helpful.

“Where does the bone graft come from?”

“Let me note for the doctor that you’d like to hear more about that. I’d hate to give you incorrect information, so let’s allow them to answer that for you in the treatment room.”

“What is the recovery like?”

“We anticipate a pretty straightforward recovery from your procedure. In general, patients have very little pain, manageable short-term discomfort, and they progress very quickly through the healing process.

You should get a ride home and expect to take it easy for the rest of the day. You should avoid all strenuous activity (e.g., working out, heavy lifting, great exertion), and you'll want to stand up slowly and get plenty of rest.

We've provided you with information about pain medication and what to eat. Beyond that, recovery from the surgical process is a matter of seeing how you feel and taking things slowly and accordingly. When it comes to the surgical site itself, I'd like to provide you with these detailed instructions on cleaning, avoiding direct chewing contact, and when to contact us for additional information and assistance."

"How long will I be sore?"

"That varies from procedure to procedure and patient to patient. Most patients tell us that after this procedure, they experience little, if any, actual pain, and that the soreness is gone within _____ days. You can expect some general awareness that you've had a procedure, and you'll want to follow your care instructions to ensure you protect the area and heal properly. But if you have discomfort that extends beyond a reasonable period of time, please contact us. We may want to see you to check on your site and healing and provide any help you may need."

"What foods can I eat?"

"Thanks for asking! We always appreciate when patients have questions about post-operative instructions. It helps us all ensure your best recovery. I have a form with general guidelines that I can share with you now, but the assistant is going to go over additional details with you in the operatory. Please be vocal with any questions or concerns you might have, and they can let you know what the doctor recommends and what most patients experience after the procedure."

"Am I going to get an antibiotic?"

"We ensure that the doctors and assistants answer these types of questions for patients because each situation varies. I'm noting your question for them so they can get you specific details. If for some reason you don't get a full understanding of how to proceed after surgery, please be persistent with your assistant or doctor and clarify the points you want to address. We want you to be confident and comfortable throughout the entire process."

"Can I have a refill of pain meds?"

"You will be provided with a prescription for the pain medication that the doctor recommends for your procedure. But many patients don't need it or decide not to take all of it because they feel better pretty quickly. You definitely want to keep yourself comfortable, but if you're still having pain when you get to the end of your pain medication, please give us a call. We'd like to hear more about what's going on, and we might ask you to come back in to check how things are healing. Of course, if the doctor sees that you have a situation that warrants more pain medication, they'll take care of that when they see you."

“Do the stitches need to be removed?”

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“How long do I keep my gauze in?”

“We ensure that the doctors and assistants answer these types of questions for patients because each situation varies. I’m noting your question for them so they can get you specific details. If for some reason you don’t get a full understanding of how to proceed after surgery, please be persistent with your assistant or doctor and clarify the points you want to address. We want you to be confident and comfortable throughout the entire process.”

“When can I work out?”

“We ensure that the doctors and assistants answer these types of questions for patients because each situation varies. I’m noting your question for them so they can get you specific details. If for some reason you don’t get a full understanding of how to proceed after surgery, please be persistent with your assistant or doctor and clarify the points you want to address. We want you to be confident and comfortable throughout the entire process.”

“Can I take a taxi home or Uber?”

“It may seem like there’s not much difference, but we ask for you to bring a driver for your appointment because it’s more than a matter of transportation. People respond to surgery in different ways, and we really do want to enlist the help of someone who can keep an eye on you. A cab driver won’t necessarily be helpful with walking you to the car, helping you into your home, or getting you settled with any medications or immediate recovery steps that may be involved. If you’re having trouble making arrangements for a driver, please let us know and we’re happy to do whatever we can to be of help.”

“Do I need someone to stay with me after I get home (after general anesthesia)?”

“It’s a very good idea to arrange for a companion for the rest of the day (and night) for patients who choose general anesthesia for their surgery. It’s not always necessary, but why not use an abundance of caution and ensure you have someone who can provide any help you need with eating, maintaining your comfort, and facilitating your overall recovery? If you have trouble making these arrangements, please let us know. We may be able to provide suggestions or resources that will be of help to you.”