

# Time for a *check up*



## Aesthetics practice business expert Gilly Dickons walks you through a clinic health check

**W**e already find ourselves in February 2022 having endured another rollercoaster ride in 2021, a year that required us to be highly adaptable and creative as we juggled ongoing covid restrictions and closures. We had to stay on our toes as we continued to learn to live with the effects of covid on our businesses. Here we are now in 2022 knowing we can't afford to take anything for granted.

Hopefully you had a great run up to Christmas 2021 with appointment slots fully booked and demand greater than ever before, having worked hard to ensure that you retained your client base throughout the ups and downs of the previous two years.

January is normally a good barometer at

the start of the year, and you should already have a feel for how things are shaping up for 2022, so now is a good time to undertake a practice review. Start by looking at your client base and the treatments you provided during 2021. This can then lead into a really thorough audit including a review of the following:

- Number and type of new enquiries that you received in 2021
- Now many of these enquiries booked a consultation
- Of those consultations, how many went on to have treatment
- Average spend of each new client
- How many existing clients you treated
- Average spend of each existing client

- Average spend per head - comparison between March 2020 and now
- Comparison of patient treatment plans pre-March 2020 and 2021 – is there a shift?
- Pre-covid regular clients that have not yet returned.

### NEW ENQUIRIES

There was a surge in new enquiries across the board in 2021 after the sector was able to fully re-open. Did you benefit from this? Did you receive many new enquiries? If not, ask yourself why; after all, new enquiries are the lifeblood of any clinic.

Is it possible that you missed a number of new opportunities because you were too busy to pick up the phone or respond to online enquiries? If you think you've missed out on securing valuable new clients, you need to consider your options to ensure this doesn't keep happening. Additional staffing support should start to pay for itself by picking up on these new opportunities, either through in-house recruitment or out-sourced support like we provide at Aesthetic Response.

Do you feel that recent new enquirers are engaging with you? Do they appear to be very price conscious? Are they shopping around? Does it feel like you're having to work hard to get them booked in? Do you sense a change between pre-covid and now? If you answer "yes" to any of these questions you may need to re-think how you're going to engage with new callers to get them to book with you.

Do you have a clear audit of how many new enquiries you received last year and how many went on to book consultations? It's really important that you review this to identify where new enquiries might be slipping the net and not converting. Each has potential value to add to your business, so look after them.

Is your attendance for consultations the same as it was prior to March 2020? If patients are failing to turn up and you identify an issue with attendance there are steps you can take that will help to secure those bookings and in turn, protect your valuable treatment time. For example, if you're not already doing so, you could consider introducing a deposit or booking fee.

How many of those who have attended the clinic for consultation have you gone on to treat? If you've got a high number of people not going onto treatment you need to find out why – don't be afraid to ask them why they chose not to proceed with you (in a polite and professional way). If you identify an underlying issue, ask yourself if there's anything you can do to address it. For example, if you find that you're not comfortable or confident with your consultations you could opt to have some coaching. If it's an issue with your pricing, think about doing a competitor review to see where your fees sit in comparison to your biggest competitors.

### EXISTING PATIENTS

Immediately after the last lockdown many practices ran extended clinic hours to manage a surge in bookings, trying to prioritise and take care of valued existing clients, while at the same time making the most of new enquiries. Eventually, waiting lists were cleared and treatments brought up to date, allowing things to return to a normal pace. Now would be a good time to review the timings of follow-up and subsequent treatments. Are clients leaving it longer between treatments than you'd prefer? Are they eking out their toxin and product or are they having more procedures than before?

Answering these questions will help you build a more accurate picture of how things are going and adapt as necessary. For example, it may be that you need to put more effective outbound communications in place to prompt clients to re-book in a timelier manner.

Where patients are spreading their treatments out over longer periods for financial reasons, you could consider offering treatment plans whereby they can spread the cost over 12 months to encourage more regular appointments.

### LAPSED PATIENTS

It's incredibly important to take the time to review your database to see if you have valued clients who have not returned since the pandemic. At Aesthetic Response we're in the unique position of seeing activity

across a wide number of clinics in the UK through our enquiry-management and diary-booking service, and in 2021 we spoke to a high number of customers who had changed clinics.

Some of these decisions were based on changes in financial situation, while others were more to do with the convenience of location (choosing a clinic local to home instead of the one near their office, for example). Some moved simply because they couldn't get re-booked quickly enough at the end of lockdown, so went elsewhere.

If you identify past regular clients that were of value to your practice, I'd suggest that you pick up the phone and try to re-engage them. Ask if they want to book an appointment and if not, why not? (Again, in a polite and professional way). Have a personalised offer based on their treatment portfolio ready to tempt them with.

## AVERAGE SPEND

Was your average client spend per head up or down if you compare 2021 to 2019 (just skip 2020 for this one)? If you identify a decrease in your clients' average spend it means you'll need more clients to make the same money – you'll have to work harder, booking more appointments. However, if the spend has increased you may be able to choose to see fewer people, enabling you to take a little more time in the day for yourself.

The big question is if people spent in the same way on the same treatments in 2021 that they did in 2019. You could then go further and break this down into new and existing patients.

Reviewing your existing clients, how does their treatment value compare with before? If the number is up this is very positive, however if spend is lower, you're going to need to attract more new clients to maintain your pre-covid business levels – it is really important to have a clear picture of where you're tracking with this.

What is the current average spend of a new client, and did this change towards the end of 2021? If it's lower than 2019 you're going to need more new clients to maintain your business, whereas if it's higher, you're in a stronger growth position.

## TREATMENT CHOICES

Have you noticed a shift in the treatments your patients are requesting? We've seen big and ongoing changes in the ways we're


working and socialising here in the UK and in the wider world. Many people are still working from home, and even those back in the office are having Zoom and Teams meetings instead of travelling longer distances or heading overseas. Are you seeing changes in treatment requests as a result of the ways life has changed?

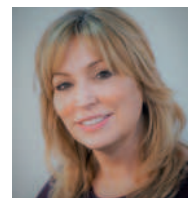
What about cosmeceuticals – are your clients purchasing more from you? Lockdowns have led to a huge increase in online shopping and as a result of covid, testers are still not available on skincare counters, changing the way consumers seek skincare-purchasing advice. This is a great chance to be your patients' go-to for their skincare products and advice. Take the time to reflect on if you've made the most of these opportunities.

## FROM AUDIT TO ACTION

How do you think you're going to fare when you run this "health check" on your business? You may be surprised at what it shows up. You need to keep your eye on all the steps in the process of your clients' journey in your clinic – from first enquiry to becoming a highly-valued regular. The work doesn't end at the point of receiving the enquiry; it's also about ensuring you respond appropriately and get it converted into an appointment – this takes time and effort, but gaining and holding onto client loyalty is key, especially after the ups and downs over the last couple of years, so make this a priority.

Over the past two years, we at Aesthetic Response have seen the best and worst in customer service across clinics in the UK. Many closed their doors and failed to communicate well during lockdown, while others were brilliant at contacting clients and keeping in touch to regularly update them and give home-based advice.

Moving forward, we're still not sure if people's buying habits may have changed longer term, especially with rising living costs. People may look to make savings on "unnecessary" expenses, so you'll need to work harder to keep in touch with clients and remind them why your services are so necessary. It is more essential than ever that you can adapt and flex while keeping your finger on the pulse of your business. My hope is that this comprehensive business health check will put you in a great position to grow and thrive in 2022. 



## GILLY DICKONS

Gilly Dickons is co-founder and managing director of Aesthetic Response, which provides an expert, award-winning enquiry-handling and diary-management service to UK aesthetic practices. Gilly's extensive insight into the aesthetic arena arises from a career spanning over 30 years in client servicing, including client-facing, marketing and clinic management.