Handling and Triaging Dental Emergencies Over the Phone

Initial Patient Interaction

- Greet the patient empathetically.
- Gather basic information (name, contact number, and whether they are an existing patient).
- Ask if they consider their situation an emergency.

Determine the Nature of the Emergency

- Ask specific questions:
- "Are you experiencing pain? Which tooth? When did it start?"
- "Is there swelling?"
- "Have you experienced trauma to the head, neck, or mouth?"

Identify True Dental Emergencies

- Consider as urgent and needing same-day treatment:
- Knocked out tooth.
- Recently broken tooth causing discomfort.
- Lingering pain not relieved by avoiding triggers (e.g., cold or chewing).
- Swelling.

Distinguish Non-Urgent Issues

- Cracked or broken teeth without pain or irritation.
- Pain that started over a week ago.
- Pain alleviated by avoiding triggers (e.g., heat or cold).

Decision Tree for Scheduling

- If it is an emergency:
  - Offer the earliest possible appointment.
  - Inform the patient about blocked emergency slots (if applicable).
  - If fully booked, offer an interim solution (e.g., smoothing an edge).
- If not an emergency:
  - Schedule the patient at the next available time slot.
  - Offer the option to wait in the office for a cancellation if they prefer

Documenting Patient Information

- Record details of the issue:
  - Description of pain or discomfort.
  - Time of onset.
  - Any relevant dental history (e.g., recent fillings, crowns, extractions).
  - Observations like swelling, bleeding, or irritation.
- Avoid leading the patient—let them describe their symptoms naturally.

Emergency Follow-Up Questions

- Has there been recent dental work? Examples include:
  - Crown placement.
  - Root canal or filling.
  - Extraction.
- Specific symptoms indicating urgency:
  - Crown or implant component has come loose.
  - Pain after a procedure that worsens or doesn't resolve.

Advise and Reassure

- Offer assurance that their concern will be addressed promptly.
- Set realistic expectations for care and possible outcomes.
- Advise against self-treatment unless recommended by the dentist.

Escalation Process

- If the patient describes severe symptoms:
- Head or neck trauma.
- Uncontrollable bleeding.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Advise them to seek immediate care at an emergency medical facility.