



Maximizing Continuing Care in Your Dental Practice

How to fill hygiene chairs, build patient loyalty
and increase hygiene production



About the Author

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Table of Contents

Getting Off the Hygiene Rollercoaster

Using the Three Rs	4
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Recall

A Card Is Not Enough

Step One: Every Patient Leaves with an Appointment	5
Step Two: Audit Your Recalls Monthly.....	5
Step Three: Mail Recall Cards.....	5
Step Four: Call One Week Ahead	5
Step Five: Practice Painless Hygiene.....	6

Recovery

When Patients Break Appointments

Step One: Call Your ASAP List.....	7
Step Two: Check Next Week's Schedule.....	7
Step Three: Find Opportunities in Today's Schedule.....	7
Step Four: Work Through Your Other Lists.....	7

Reactivation

Overdue But Not Forgotten

Step One: Start a Campaign.....	8
Step Two: Make a Special Offer	8
Step Three: Run a Credit Balance Report.....	8

Improving Efficiency

Leverage Your Dental Software

Ask a Professional for Help	9
Rely on the Industry Leader	9

Getting Off the Hygiene Rollercoaster

Using the Three Rs

Three common problems dentists have with continuing care are last-minute changes to the schedule, no-shows, and open time in the hygiene chair. If your practice has experienced any of these problems, this eBook is for you.

Many practices are on a hygiene rollercoaster: their schedule is full, but they don't manage continuing care effectively. As a result, they go from no room in hygiene to too much room in hygiene.

You can stop this frustrating up-and-down cycle by managing your continuing care systematically, using the Three Rs:

- Recall
- Recovery
- Reactivation

Implementing the Three Rs in your practice helps you spend time on the most important tasks—rather than allowing urgent tasks to consume your time. Urgent tasks must be done now (putting out fires, for example). On the other hand:

Important tasks are what you do consistently to prevent fires and achieve your goals.

The next sections of this eBook describe proven systems that help you fill your hygiene chairs, build patient loyalty and increase hygiene production. Strong systems—unique ways of doing tasks in an orderly sequence to achieve desired outcomes—set you up to be successful in your practice.

Do you fear open time in your hygiene chair? Would you like to solve last-minute schedule changes and no-shows once and for all? Keep reading.

Poor Hygiene?

A typical general practice dentist who has been in business **12 years** usually accumulates a patient base of approximately **2,500**.

The average dental practice sees about 30 new patients a month.

If you are seeing 30 new patients a month for 12 years, your patient base should be closer to **3,500** – not 2,500.

What accounts for this loss of nearly **1,000** patients? Not retaining your hygiene patients.

You could be losing those 1,000 patients are being lost to other dentists. One of the top causes of patient loss is a personal connection with the patient.

Building personal relationships with patients is paramount to gaining their trust and giving them a reason to continue to choose your dental practice over your competitors.

Source: www.hygienediamonds.com

Recall

A Card Is Not Enough

The recall system is for patients who are already scheduled and due for their hygiene visits.

Step One: Every Patient Leaves with an Appointment

Your dialog should be smooth enough to convince every patient that this is the best way to ensure future health. What do you say to those who just want a card?

“You know, we just don’t do it that way anymore. Let me tell you what works so much better for our patients.”

Step Two: Audit Your Recalls Monthly

Run a continuing care report for the last full month. All of these patients are due for recall in six months. Look at the total number who have appointments scheduled. Divide the number of patients scheduled six months from now by the number of patients due for recall to get your percentage of recall effectiveness.

Your recall effectiveness should be 95 percent or higher. If you’re only pre-scheduling 65 percent of your patient base, your attrition rate is 35 percent—way too high.

Step Three: Mail Recall Cards

Send self-addressed cards two to three weeks ahead of the appointment. Self-addressed cards in the patient’s own handwriting get noticed more than computer-printed address labels.

Use new, up-to-date cards that convey the feeling you want patients to have about your office. Sending the same card you’ve been using for the past 10 years sends the wrong message.

Include a request for the patient to call and confirm the date and time of their appointment.

Step Four: Call One Week Ahead

The “silver bullet” for recall—the most powerful

Downtime Costs

Up to 10 percent of dental appointments are cancelled. How much do cancellations hurt your revenue?

If a practice loses one appointment each day for a year, the lost production would be in the range of **\$30,000 to \$140,000**.

In the average dental practice, up to **45 percent** of patients in the hygiene chair are diagnosed with a clinical need. Open hygiene chair time can have a directly impact on your production and profitability.

For this reason, every practice should have a **hygiene coordinator**. This role is responsible for helping your team follow the Three Rs.

When a last-minute change opens up time in the schedule, the hygiene coordinator leads the charge to fill that time. A good hygiene coordinator can **save your practice thousands** of dollars in downtime costs.

Source: www.hygienediamonds.com

Recall

A Card Is Not Enough (*continued*)

strategy—is the courtesy phone call one week before the patient’s scheduled appointment. Say something like:

"This is Wendy from ABC Dental Care. I'm giving you a courtesy reminder about your appointment next week. You scheduled this appointment six months ago and we just wanted to let you know we're looking forward to seeing you. I'll call again next week on the day before your appointment just to confirm."

When you make the one-week-ahead call, patients will let you know right away if they have a conflict. Then you have an entire week to fill that gap in your schedule.

Let patients know you'll call again to confirm one day before the appointment so they won't be annoyed by another call from your office. This shows them how serious you are about patients keeping their appointments.

Step Five: Practice Painless Hygiene

Are you using the latest painless techniques? Are your instruments properly sharpened?

If the tissues are healthy, there's no reason why pain should be involved during a hygiene visit. However, fear of pain may be keeping your hygiene patients away. Discuss this with your patients and include it in your next patient survey.

Happy Returns

Many people dread going to the dentist. Why not offer them an extra incentive to come in?

A big part of your hygiene department's success is patient retention. Here's a strategy that keeps patients returning again and again:

Offer Whitening for Life™ (or a similar **patient loyalty program**) to every patient.

The WFL program isn't just helping your patients whiten their smiles. It also requires something in return.

To enroll, patients commit to stay current on their preventive schedule. They also agree to give advance notice of cancellations.

Source:

www.theteamtraininginstitute.com/whitening-for-life

Recovery

When Patients Break Appointments

Use the recovery system when a last-minute change creates open time in your schedule.

Step One: Call Your ASAP List

This list is for patients who say yes to this question when scheduling appointments: “If we have an appointment that opens up sooner, would you like to know?” (ASAP is not a list of patients who have cancelled or failed an appointment.)

Step Two: Check Next Week’s Schedule

Look in next week’s schedule for the same day and time of today’s cancelled appointment. Call those patients first and offer to get them in today instead of next week.

Step Three: Find Opportunities in Today’s Schedule

Coordinate with your team members to find opportunities in today’s schedule. For example, of the people coming in today, is there anyone:

- Who is here for something else but may be able to accept a recall the same day?
- Who might have family members who are overdue for hygiene and could come in today?

Step Four: Work Through Your Other Lists

If the first three steps fail, start calling the patients on your lists of broken-appointments list, recall list, and unscheduled-treatment until you fill your schedule.

This step only works if you keep your lists current. Your dental software should help you do this so everyone on the team can find and make calls from the appropriate list during open time.

Quick Recovery

Use these tips to quickly recover from last-minute schedule changes.

Every time you schedule patients, ask them if they’d like to come in sooner if an opening comes up.

Maintain **50 to 75** patients on your ASAP List.

When you’re trying to fill empty time, go to your **ASAP List** first.

When you call ASAP patients, say something like this:

“When we scheduled your appointment, you asked me to call if something else became available sooner. We had a last-minute change to the schedule for this afternoon, and the first person I thought of was you.”

Never talk to patients about cancellations. Use “last-minute changes” instead.

Alert the entire team and work together to fill the open time.

Reactivation

Overdue But Not Forgotten

The reactivation system is only for patients who haven't visited your office for 18 months or more. Some practices stop reaching out to patients who haven't come in for 18 months. They assume the patient has moved away or found another dentist.

Often, people don't go to the dentist unless something is bothering them. Or they feel guilty and don't want to hear the flossing lecture so they stay away. Reactivation takes persistence, but in today's competitive dental market, it's well worth it. Don't get discouraged:

It takes an average of four or five attempts before you have success in reactivating a patient.

Step One: Start a Campaign

Assign a specific team leader to work with the doctor and define a reactivation campaign. A campaign can be as simple as a creative letter followed by a phone call, then a postcard, a second phone call and finally a lumpy mail item.

Lumpy items grab more attention than flat envelopes. Use your imagination—try a mailing tube, a toothbrush, a seed packet, a magnet, a message in a bottle—to say “we want you back.”

Step Two: Make a Special Offer

Send your inactive patients an invitation to come in for a complimentary checkup. If they don't respond to the invitation, send them a creative letter inviting them to come in for a free checkup. If they still haven't responded, send them a “final offer” postcard to get a free checkup.

Step Three: Run a Credit Balance Report

Contact inactive patients who have a credit balance to let them know the good news—they have funds they can spend on oral care. Encourage them to schedule elective treatment. Send postcards with special offers to patients who have treatment plans.

Why Reactivate?

Why spend time and money reactivating a patient you haven't seen in 18 months?

Because first, you don't know why they haven't come in. It could be a reason such as:

The patient lost dental benefits due to layoff, termination, or benefit reductions in the company where they work.

The patient became acutely or chronically ill.

You canceled the appointment because of hygienist or dentist absence.

These reasons don't mean the patient doesn't want to come back. They may simply need an invitation from you.

And second, reactivation costs less than attracting new patients.

On average, it costs six times more to gain a new patient than it does to retain an existing one.

Source: <http://www.dentaltown.com/dentaltown/Blogs.aspx?action=VIEWBLOG&b=117>

Improving Efficiency

Leverage Your Dental Software

Dental practice management software such as Dentrrix can help your hygiene department be more efficient and, as a result, increase the productivity of your practice.

Dentrrix helps keep your hygiene chairs full by:

- Sending continuing care reminders automatically
- Keeping your patient lists current
- Instantly creating custom phone lists
- Allowing patients to confirm via text message.

Plus, the Dentrrix Practice Advisor report shows the total production for your practice and for each provider and hygienist. You can see at-a-glance how well your continuing care improvements are working.

Ask a Professional for Help

To jumpstart your continuing care, you may need professional help from an experienced dental consultant like Wendy Briggs who specializes in increasing hygiene productivity. For more information, visit www.hygienediamonds.com.

Rely on the Industry Leader

Dentrrix provides software solutions for greater productivity and profitability in your practice. That's why more than 35,000 dental practices rely on Dentrrix today.

In addition to full-featured clinical tools, Dentrrix includes financial analytics, accounting and billing tools, innovative eServices, training seminars, profitability coaching and more.

Only Dentrrix offers many compatible solutions from third-party dental technology providers. And, only Dentrrix is backed by Henry Schein, the most respected solution provider to office-based healthcare practitioners worldwide.

Dentrrix Tools

Dentrrix includes these continuing care tools:

ASAP List for patients who want to get in sooner than originally scheduled

Continuing Care List for unscheduled patients who are overdue for hygiene

Unscheduled Treatment Plans Report for finding patients who need a certain procedure so you can fill a specific time slot

Letters & Custom Lists to generate a working list of patients who meet specific criteria such as over due recare, treatment plan for a range of procedures, no appointment, etc.

Treatment Plans with Benefits Available Report for patients who have treatment plans posted to the Ledger and unused insurance benefits available

Unscheduled List for patients who have either broken an appointment or asked to be on will-call

Inactive Patient List to contact and reactivate patients.

Visit www.dentrrix.com for details.

