A PATIENT-CENTERED APPROACH to Making Your Hygiene Department More Profitable

BY KATHY EDWARDS, RDH, PRACTICE SUPPORT SPECIALIST, THE PRACTICE SUPPORT TEAM AT BURKHART

What differentiates a comprehensive, health-centered hygiene program from the buff and polish hygiene? The comprehensive hygiene:

- Assesses the individual needs of each patient prior to treatment, recommending appropriate therapy as indicated. One are the days of the routine six-month interval recommended regardless of individual oral health needs.
- Is not influenced by insurance limitations, but rather focuses on the optimal hygiene treatment for the patient.
- Builds trust and credibility with patients based on sincerity and integrity.
- Communicates the value of the next recare or periodontal maintenance appointment, reducing the risk of no-shows and last-minute cancellations.

This involves educating the patient as to the reason for the interval chosen and the areas of special concern to be monitored closely for disease progression.

- Selects a custom homecare routine to further support his or her patients, not strictly for licensing requirements.
- Does not hesitate to use adjunctive therapy, revising periodontal therapy as needed to meet unique individual health needs.
- Stays current with continuing education and involvement of the patient, for a continual flow of patients scheduling appointments in areas of special concern to be monitored closely for disease progression.
- Selects a custom homecare routine to further support the doctor's values and vision for the practice.
- An empathetic, caring hygienist who strives to be comprehensive while vigorously supporting the doctor's clinical philosophy is one of the most important partnerships in the practice. Time spent on behalf of the dentist developing this role is a worthwhile investment that will provide long-term benefits for the practice.

The Practice Support Team at Burkhart provides business insight and strategies to Burkhart's doctors and our branch teams to help our doctors build stronger practices. Whether it is a valuable phone call, a webinar, or a Practice View we have the resources to support your practice.

A patient base that statistically falls due to making your hygiene department more profitable:

- With a patient-centered approach, the hygienist becomes the patient advocate for a consultation with the dentist to develop a customized treatment plan for the patient.
- A top-notch hygiene program can positively impact your profitability in the following areas:
  - An increase in periodontal treatment acceptance to include periodontal therapy, active maintenance, and adjunctive therapy.
  - An increase in profits as the number of six-month recare patients move to a more beneficial three- and four-month interval.
  - An increase in demand for proactive, restorative, and aesthetic procedures will emerge as the patient interview process is refined and patient desires are addressed.
  - Patient loyalty and increased referrals will follow as patients experience a consistent, comprehensive approach that makes your practice stand out over previous experiences they have had in other dental settings.

- A significant drop in last-minute cancellations, the silent killer in the hygiene department, will naturally occur as patients become partners with their hygienist in preventing or controlling their periodontal disease. Patients should never exit a hygiene chair without knowing the areas of concern that will be monitored and re-evaluated at the next appointment (such as sensitivity, gingival recession, etc.). This places value on the recare visit even before the current appointment ends.

Additional patient-centered yet bottom-line tactics:

- Offer adult fluoride treatments. They’re a great benefit for your patient and are being covered by more and more insurance plans.
- Include two anterior PAs into your next appointment (such as sensitivity, gingival recession, etc.). This places value on the recare visit even before the current appointment ends.
- Allow your hygienist to call on overdue periodontal patients during downtime. Statistically, they will have more success with the periodontal population than an administrative team member will.

An increase in profits as the number of six-month recare patients move to a more beneficial three- and four-month interval.

• A consistent, purposeful transition to the dentist during the hygiene exam that includes a relationship aspect to allow the patient and dentist to build a level of trust, as well as periodontal, function, and aesthetic findings. If a consultation is in order, the hygienist can alert the dentist at the onset of the exam.
- Growth primarily through internal patient referrals. When patient expectations have been clarified through purposeful interviewing and met through exceptional clinical care, patients are more likely to refer family and friends.

Comprehensive health-centered hygienists require additional support from their dentists beyond what their traditional counterparts required. A doctor-hygienist meeting to clarify the doctor’s clinical and periodontal philosophy will allow the hygienist to further support the doctor’s values and vision for the practice. Further defining the consultation criteria for the patient allows the hygienist to guide the patient in that direction prior to the exam. The hygienist becomes the patient advocate and promoter for the dentist at the same time. Professional coaching is an excellent means to further develop your hygienists in their quest to become more comprehensive.

A continual flow of patients scheduling appointments allows purposeful patient interviews, thorough assessments, and sincere planning strategies with each patient co-discovering the best method to ensure long-term oral health and maintenance of teeth and gums. Less time would be spent on chatting and exchanging stories. Purposeful relationship-building is key in the hygiene chair for trust and credibility to be established. Lingering too long on building personal relationships can detract from the patient’s ability to feel confident with the health care they are receiving.

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Philosophy of a comprehensive hygiene program, how can you evaluate the effectiveness of the hygiene program in your practice? Fortunately, it is more concrete than that which accepted the buff and polish appointment without question. The allure of the patient must continually be earned at each appointment, with the value of the care outweighing the financial investment. Today’s client base is no longer regarded as “patients”—they are considered health care consumers whose goal is to spend their money wisely.

By Kathy Edwards, RDH, Practice Support Specialist, The Practice Support Team at Burkhart

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