



Staffing Contingency Plans

As practices across the country re-open for elective care, the risk of a staff member contracting COVID-19 becomes a real possibility. In addition, staff members may need to take time off to care for a family member who has contracted the virus, remain in quarantine after an encounter themselves, or simply decide to find another job or leave the dental field entirely. The CDC recommends contingency capacity strategies as an essential step to mitigate staffing shortages. Staffing contingency plans are a forward thinking, **proactive** approach to prepare for a potential staffing challenge *before* it happens.

Create written standard operating procedures (SOP) to allow team members the opportunity to jump in and help where needed. Well-written plans will provide systematic guides that can be used during an emergency as well as aid in training future employees.

Cross-train whenever possible and keep skills current by utilizing the new training on a regular basis. Not only will cross-training decrease stress in the practice when an emergency occurs, it brings greater job satisfaction and enhances the value of each staff member to the practice.

Develop a recruiting system to create ads for each position to post on various job placement sites and social media channels. See “Recruiting During and After a Pandemic” and “Recruiting – Building Ads to Attract Top Candidates.”

Maintain a list of temporary help that you can call on short notice. Temporary workers appreciate the familiarity of practices they have helped in the past and are more likely to help again in the future.

Always be recruiting through your social media feeds and community engagement. Share your practice culture, what distinguishes it, and what a great place it is to work.

Dentist/Associate

The loss of a dentist, even temporarily, creates a tremendous stress. Not only will this loss impact the ability to provide care for your patients, supporting staff may be affected as well.

- Sole-proprietors
 - Seek a temporary dentist through a locum tenens dental service.
 - Build an affiliation with a colleague who agrees to provide emergency care. Local study clubs are a good source for developing these relationships.



- Allow your hygienists an opportunity to continue to provide hygiene care if allowed by your state dental board.
- Furlough staff as needed.
- Consider keeping one team member for limited hours each day to return calls and re-schedule patients.
- Group practices
 - When possible, increase hours for additional owners or Associates to provide needed care.
 - Triage patients to provide most urgent care as a priority.
 - Increase the use of teledentistry.
 - Refer treatment to local specialists until the practice can once again handle the demand.

Front Office

- Cross-train all members of the front office team so they can easily fill in for each other and accomplish the most critical tasks each day.
- Cross-train a dental assistant to be able to take over COVID-19 screening, scheduling, and over-the-counter collections.
- Consider outsourcing tasks such as insurance verification, claims filing, accounts receivable, and phone answering assistance. This is an excellent way to mitigate the temporary loss of a front office team member.

Dental Hygienist

- Meet with your hygiene team to see if other hygienists are willing to pick up additional hours.
- Seek temporary hygiene help through local agencies, Indeed, LinkedIn and Facebook groups.
- Consider alternative schedules that will allow a greater number of patients to be seen with the current staff you have. See “Hygiene Scheduling Options.”
- Dentists may need to provide hygiene services with the help of an assistant.



Dental Assistant

- Extend current appointment times to allow remaining assistants an opportunity to complete additional tasks such as sterilization and Op turnover in between patients.
- Utilize equipment, such as Isolyte, to free the dental assistant to take care of other patients while the dentist works alone.
- Make sure clinical staff are not assigned tasks that could be covered by a non-clinical team member.