



Scheduling for Success

Keeping the schedule full during the pandemic.

The pandemic has brought numerous challenges to the dental community. Initial closures resulted in lengthy short-call lists with little room to accommodate the growing number of patients in need. The result? Record production months for dental practices. Additional local government restrictions, general fear for personal safety, or a lack of value placed on oral health may be creating a new challenge – keeping the schedule full as the number of last-minute cancellations and no-show appointments grow. Taking proactive steps to fill your schedule will help the practice recover more fully from the losses incurred due to COVID-19.

Reassurance

Higher levels of anxiety and fear among patients require frequent reassurance. Cultivate a culture of trust with ongoing information, support, and resources. Your patients are looking for leadership and guidance.

- If you updated your website or sent reassurance emails early during the pandemic, it is time to do it again – continue to communicate frequently.
- Utilize social media channels to highlight the safety measures you have taken and connect the dots between overall health and oral health. Include a recent article from Dr. BiCuspid.
- Send emails two weeks in advance to patients on the schedule letting them know the steps you are taking to ensure their safety. It's OK to let your patients know you have always been infection control specialists and integrating additional protocols is a seamless process.
- Let patients know the steps you have taken beyond the required measures to reduce fear-based cancellations.

Confirmation Systems

Confirmation systems utilizing technology are crucial now. Reach your patients via text, email, and phone to confirm their upcoming appointment. When utilizing a third-party confirmation platform, be sure to reach out individually to anyone who did not positively respond to their



reminder. According to Pew Research, 83% of Americans own a cell phone and 73% of those use text messaging.¹ Younger people prefer text messages while those over age 65 prefer phone or email communication.

- Confirm appointments with multiple methods to reach your patients.
- Send confirmations two weeks in advance, two days in advance, and a 1-hour reminder when requested.
- Early confirmations provide more time to fill an appointment when someone cancels.

Strengthen Your Workflow

Front-load your patient screening questions by sending them two days in advance of their appointment. The more time they have already spent confirming the appointment, the more likely they will show up. This also showcases the technology you have incorporated to create a touchless experience.

Short Call List

Actively work to maintain a short call list; your only life ring when a no-show occurs.

- Ask patients if they would like to be called if an earlier opportunity presents.
- Build the short call list with chronic no-show patients who are more likely to keep an appointment when scheduled for the same day.
- Identify patients in the schedule who have hygiene or restorative needs that could be provided if a last-minute opportunity becomes available.

Increase Same-Day Dentistry

Reduce the number of appointments and the potential for cancellations by completing additional treatment in the same visit. For example, offer to complete diagnosed fillings after a hygiene visit. This requires strong teamwork. The doctor will need to make the call at the exam if there's a possibility to provide diagnosed treatment.

- *"I'd like to save you another trip to the practice, reducing your number of visits and exposures by completing this filling today. If you can stay for another hour, my team and I can make it happen."*



Shadow Scheduling

If you have available ops and can still ensure adequate space between patients while following your state health mandates, shadow scheduling is an option.

- Selectively double-book the hygiene schedule for any time slot you have not had a positive confirmation or if you have a “feeling” the patient may no-show. Front desk team members can often pinpoint a patient they think may no-show or cancel.
- If both patients show up, the team works together to either complete both hygiene visits through an assisted approach or provide at least the x-rays and exam for the patient who did not confirm their appointment.

Teledentistry

Teledentistry provides a safe opportunity to connect patients with their dentist when concerns arise. It is safer for the patient and reduces practice overhead by eliminating the need for PPE and op turnover costs. The ADA encourages dentists to continue to offer teledentistry services.

- Block time for teledentistry opportunities.
- The assistant or front office team member can manage the initial portion of the call to establish billing, health updates, etc.

Recare System

Create campaigns to target your overdue hygiene recare visits. If the hygienist finds they have time without a patient, they are the ideal person to place a phone call to patients with who they have established relationships.

- Send overdue recare letters incorporating safety information for reassurance.
- Reach patients via multiple means – text, email, and phone.

Create Value Through Comprehensive Treatment Planning (Hygiene Included!)

Create value patients can understand. Verbalize what you are doing, why it is important, and how you will team up with the patient for ongoing health. Patients cancel appointments where they don't find value. You can prevent this.



- Focus on long-term health for the patient and, as much as you can, give them a “heads-up” on what they may expect in the future. For example, teeth with large, older amalgams may need additional treatment in the future.
- Tie oral health to overall health.
- Be specific with each patient regarding their condition. For example, let them know you are looking forward to seeing them in three more months to evaluate the deeper pocket on the lower right.
- Let them know areas you are actively monitoring beginning decay or signs of tissue breakdown.

1 <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2011/09/19/americans-and-text-messaging/>