

## New Year's Resolutions For Your Practice

Losing weight, working out and spending more time with family are all excellent New Year's resolutions. But how about making some resolutions for your practice? This edition of *PMM News* provides 15 great ideas for New Year's resolutions that will increase the productivity, profitability and professionalism of your practice.

### Resolution 1: Invite Your Team To Select A Special Event

Wright Communications research with dental practices shows that holiday parties, dinner at the team's choice of restaurant and shopping sprees with bonus money rank highest in motivational value for dental employees. Continuing education programs are also popular as rewards for strong performance. Sporting events such as ball games and bowling rank lower in motivational value. The ideal times to schedule special events are weekday evenings or paid workdays. (Weekends are difficult due to family outings and other engagements.) The most important tip for a truly motivational team event is to allow staff members to choose the activity.

### Resolution 2: Purge Your Patient Files

It seems to be an industry standard that 90 percent of your problems come from 10 percent of your patients. Review your files and dismiss those patient families that create the most stress for your practice because of frequent cancellations, interrupted treatment, etc. Be sure to notify the parent not just on the phone or in person, but also in writing. Your letter should emphasize the importance of rapport and cooperation between dentist, parent and child; careful review of the patient's medical and dental records; professional opinion that treatment recommendations are not being followed; and your belief that the child's health will be best served by receiving dental services from another dentist. To protect yourself from issues of patient abandonment, be sure to note that your office will be available for emergency care for 30 to 60 days. Encourage the parent to contact your office to let you know where dental records should be sent.

### Resolution 3: Consider Your Language Capabilities

If your community reflects the nation, you have a growing base of patients who speaks a language other than English. Do you need brochures or information sheets in another language? Do you have – or could you hire – a staff member fluent in the language? Would one of your current staff be interested in enrolling in a language course?

### Resolution 4: Review Your Patient/Parent Materials

Dedicate a staff meeting to a thorough review of your written materials for patients and parents. Do you have current brochures

on such topics of interest as infant dental care, diet and snacking, emergency care, esthetic dentistry, fluoride and fluorosis, sealants, early orthodontics, microabrasion, sports safety and space maintenance? (The AAPD is an excellent source for brochures on these topics and more.) Are your post-treatment instruction sheets for parents up-to-date and easy-to-read? What subjects do team members get questions on for which you do not have written information, such as X-ray safety or conscious sedation?

### Resolution 5: Videotape One Of Your Case Presentations

You can assess the quality of your case presentations – and greatly increase treatment acceptance – by videotaping and critiquing a sample case presentation. Choose a patient case, bring in your video camera and ask a team member or congenial parent to play the listening role in the exercise. Videotape 15 to 30 minutes of a case presentation, and then review it at your leisure. In terms of content, consider the clarity of your language, quality of your examples and ability to relate to parent interests. In terms of delivery, evaluate your demeanor both as a speaker and listener. The Evaluation Worksheet below can serve as your guide.

#### Case Presentation Evaluation Worksheet

##### Content Topics

Review of patient history  
Dental conditions  
Results of no treatment  
Treatment recommendations  
(benefits, limitations, risks)  
Expected treatment results  
Treatment alternatives  
Post-treatment expectations

##### Delivery Topics

Eye contact  
Facial expression  
Body position  
Gestures  
Vocal style

### Resolution 6: Give Your Team More Compliments And Praise

According to Wright Communications research, a positive, caring environment is the most motivational aspect of a dental practice for team members. Therefore, giving ample praise and treating your staff with respect and kindness will greatly enhance the attitude of your team and atmosphere of your practice.

### Resolution 7: Conduct A Patient Survey

Survey at least 100 parents (or parent couples) to discover what you are doing well in your practice – and what you are doing not so well. You can ask about such aspects of your practice as phone manner, appointment promptness, treatment progress satisfaction, and gentleness and conscientiousness of your clinical staff.

## Resolution 8: Update Your Market Research

Demographic shifts in your local community can help your practice if you keep abreast of the changes, or hurt your practice if you ignore them. Is your town growing in terms of a specific population group? Is your population shrinking due to lay-offs by a major employer? The local dental society, Chamber of Commerce and reference section of your local library are great information sources on population demographics and economic trends in your area. Or, research your community online. For example, the Web site [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov) offers quick facts on your state and county.

## Resolution 9: Take A Tour Of Your Reception Room

What atmosphere greets parents and patients new to your practice? Does it have comfortable seating for parents and patients of various age groups? Does the carpet, floor or furniture need to be cleaned or repaired? Is the play area stocked with interesting books and toys for patients of all ages? Are the office signs and wall art appealing and in good condition? Are reading materials for parents current and arranged neatly in a rack? Do you have a scrapbook of pictures and thank-you letters from patients?

## Resolution 10: Upgrade Your Patient Giveaways

Toothbrushes and floss are great, as are buttons and stickers. But how about a wider selection? Small teddy bears? Rubber snakes? Funny hats? Slinkies? How about holiday vacation packages with travel toothbrushes, small tubes of toothpaste and floss?

## Resolution 11: Make A Speech

Although giving talks to the local grade schools during National Dental Health Month is an excellent community service, addressing adults in your community is an even better marketing strategy. Local groups that reach your target market include Lamaze classes, parenting classes, nursing groups, and support groups for the parents of special needs children. You could cover such topics as dental health during pregnancy, infant dental care, the first dental visit, pacifiers and thumb sucking, nursing bottle caries and teething. Other possibilities include providing dental health education for school nurses, and discussing mouth protectors and emergency care with gym teachers and coaches.

## Resolution 12: Update Your Office Policy Manual

Employee policy manuals are essential for effectively managing employees and helping staff members accomplish their job responsibilities. Review your office manual to make sure it accurately describes your current personnel policies, including such topics as

vacation, sick leave, pension plans, medical benefits and your disciplinary process. If your manual also serves as a guide to performing office functions, review those sections for accuracy as well.

## Resolution 13: Develop A Practice Web Site

A Web site can provide a positive introduction to you, your staff and pediatric dental services to new and potential patient families. Health and dental professionals can visit your Web site to find what they want to know about your services and how to refer patients to your practice. Your site can provide essential information to parents such as hours, location, services, payment options and directions to your office. It can offer dental health education on such topics as teething, dental emergencies, sealants and smokeless tobacco. (The AAPD offers members valuable assistance in Web site development).

## Resolution 14: Conduct Better Staff Meetings

To have stronger team meetings, schedule them at a regular time, such as the third Tuesday of each month or every other Thursday afternoon. Require attendance, distribute an agenda in advance, start on time, provide snacks or lunch, assign a recorder to take notes of decisions and new projects, and pay your staff for the time. Possible team meeting topics include setting production goals, discussing office policy changes and brainstorming new marketing ideas. You can also review office objectives such as the number of new patients each month, gross production, number of referrals, case acceptance rates, patient billings and level of parent satisfaction with the practice.

## Resolution 15: Renew Your Contacts With Referring Health Care Professionals

Referrals come to your practice from a wide variety of health care sources, including pediatricians, general dentists, pharmacists, nurses and speech pathologists. Revise your letters of appreciation and reconsider your gifts to consistently referring offices. Take one referring professional to lunch each month. Invite staff members of referring general dentists to your office to meet your team and observe your techniques. When you learn a new health care professional has come to your area (the local paper and dental society meetings are good sources for this type of information) send a card or letter as a welcome to your community. Set up an appointment to introduce yourself and discuss areas of common interest.

Choose to take action on one or more of these resolutions and you will see positive effects on your practice, your team and your patients. The staff of *PMM News* wishes you and yours a very Happy New Year!

# PMMNews

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