



LCP Dental Team Coaching (formerly Julie Weir & Associates) is recognized as the premier consulting firm specializing in pediatric dentistry since 1996.

Five Ways Digital Technology Will Improve Your Practice Today

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused fear, frustration, and confusion in people all over the world. Patients now have new expectations of health care providers regarding safety and communication. Dental practices must embrace new ways to connect with patients, maintain a contactless experience, and still provide the same, if not better, level of service and care. In addition to keeping patients safe, utilizing digital technology in the office increases productivity, efficiency, and streamlines each appointment to get patients in and out quickly.

Online Appointment Requests and Scheduling

- **Stay competitive** with practices in your area as many dental practices already have online scheduling in place. Studies say that 94 percent of patients would select a dental practice because it offers the ability to schedule appointments online.
- **Keeps your schedule full** as most online appointments are made for the same day or next day.
- **Offers flexibility for patients** to schedule appointments outside of normal business hours.
- **Be sure the online scheduling company can integrate with your software and follow your block schedule.** Consider customizing the scheduling feature to allow only new patients, preventive visits, and emergencies to reserve appointments online.
- **Online appointment requests should be closely monitored** by a front office team member. During business hours, all requests should be responded to right away.

Digital Patient Intake Experience

- **Implementing digital new patient registration forms and digital health history updates saves time** for both the patient and team, as well as lowers costs by ordering less paper and printer ink.
- **Boosts front office efficiency** by eliminating extra steps such as printing paper forms, manually entering information, and scanning the forms into the practice management software.

- **Improves accuracy of data entry** as the front office team does not have to read and interpret handwritten forms.
- **Protects patient privacy when using secure forms on a secure internet connection.**
- **Decreases no-shows and cancellations** as patients are more invested having filled out their new patient registration forms in advance.
- **Customize forms to include all demographic, insurance, and dental/medical history information.** New patient registration forms should contain all financial agreements, appointment agreements, consent for authorized persons, HIPAA forms, and any other form deemed necessary by your state.
- **Email and/or text new patient registration forms** to the responsible party once the appointment has been scheduled. Send a text and/or email reminder if forms have not been received by the practice within 7 days of appointment. This gives the patient ample time to return the forms so the front office team can check insurance eligibility and get a full breakdown of benefits.

Electronic Patient Communication

- **Utilize two-way text message and email** when communicating with parents regarding appointments, outstanding accounts, and practice updates. Patients are more likely to respond first to a text message before an email or phone call.
- **Flag priority messages** regarding accounts or special notes regarding an appointment. Be sure these important messages or notes are saved in the patient's account and shared during Morning Meeting, as needed.

- **Maintain HIPAA compliance when sending texts and/oremails.** The entire team should attend HIPAA training each year. If it has been longer than one year since your last training, be sure to schedule a training as soon as possible. There may be options for virtual HIPAA training in your area if trainers are not physically coming into the offices at this time.
- **Keep it professional.** It can be easy for professionalism to get lost in electronic communication, especially in two-way text conversations. Review with your team the importance of professionalism and tone when sending texts and emails to patients.
- **Automate messages** through customized templates to increase efficiency.
- **Communicate with patients often**, especially as changes are constantly occurring. Newsletters should be sent weekly or bi-weekly, depending on changes happening in the practice. When important changes do occur, make sure a text is sent out to all patients as well.
- **Create a calendar** that marks dates for social media posts, deadlines for newsletters, and when texts and emails should go out to patients. If you do not create a calendar for these things, it may not get done!

Contactless Payments

- **Keeps patients and team members safe** by eliminating contact during the check-out process.
- **Contactless Payment Options**
 - **Apple Pay, Samsung Pay, or Google Pay.** With these options, no physical card needs to exchange hands. Since COVID-19 started spreading in the United States, it is estimated that the use of contactless payments has risen over 20%.
 - **Online payment portal.** Your website should have an online portal in which patients can view and print statements, as well as pay their account balances. Patients want to pay when it is convenient for them, and most often, it is outside business hours. Additionally, checks are being used less frequently, which means without the option to pay online, they may feel inconvenienced or frustrated when finding the time to call the office to make a payment. With an online payment portal, patients can make a payment anytime, anywhere.
 - **Links through text and email.** To receive payment quicker, send a text message to the financially responsible parent about the outstanding account along with a copy of their statement and a link to make a payment on your website through the online portal. Keep in mind that the easier we can make this for them, the more likely patients are to do it.

- **Card on file.** In the past, keeping cards on file was met with more hesitation. As dental practices move forward, it is becoming easier and more accepted to keep cards on file. In fact, it is becoming desired from patients who want the same payment options and flexibility as they do in the retail industry. The best way to gather card information is during the registration process. To keep the information secure, be sure all credit card information can be stored with your credit card merchant and that it is encrypted.

Teledentistry & Hybrid Care

- **Hybrid care is here to stay.** As the need for remote dentistry increases, dental practices must find a way to implement it in their offices. Since teledentistry is new to many providers, it is important that this service is well planned out and discussed with the entire team to eliminate confusion. Schedule a training with your team to run through step by step how the virtual visits will flow.
- **Contact your malpractice insurance** to ensure teledentistry is covered under your plan.
- **Consider what types of appointments can and will be available for teledentistry visits.** Most providers do not see new patients through a virtual visit; however, many will see existing patients in cases of emergencies or clinical consultations.
- **Create a teledentistry appointment type in your practice management software** and create a spot for these appointments in your block schedule. While children are out of school, consider placing these blocks in the harder to fill slots in the day, from 10am to 2pm. As children return to school, consider having one teledentistry block in the morning and one in the afternoon for flexibility around school schedules.
- **Tell your patients about this service** through your practice newsletters, social media, email blasts or text message. Be sure to include how your patients can reserve teledentistry appointments and how they will access the virtual appointment at their scheduled time.
- **Decide how your virtual visits will be accessed.** Many patient communication softwares are offering teledentistry services, such as access to patients' records and secure video portals, to keep communication streamlined and efficient.
- **Be sure to contact all payers** and see how each one is reimbursing teledentistry visits. Some payers may only be reimbursing these codes during the pandemic. In addition, ask payers if teledentistry will be reimbursed for virtual visits that cross state lines, if appropriate. California does not allow this.

- **Bill them properly.** According to the ADA's coding guidelines for teledentistry visits, you should report one of the two designated teledentistry codes in addition to other procedures, such as a limited exam, re-evaluation, post-operative visit, or dental case management. The main difference between the two codes below is that one should be billed for a live, two-way interaction through technology (e.g., Zoom Video or video portal) and the other should be billed when the dentist evaluates a condition using radiographs, photographs, etc. outside of a live interaction.
- **D9995 teledentistry – synchronous; real time encounter.** Reported in addition to other procedures (e.g., diagnostic) delivered to the patient on the date of service
- **D9996 teledentistry – asynchronous; information stored and forwarded to dentist for subsequent review.** Reported in addition to other procedures (e.g. diagnostic) delivered to the patient on the date of service

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way dental practices do business. For most doctors, this pandemic has exposed what is most broken in their practices. Instead of focusing on what is broken, we can choose to focus on what can be learned from it. The practices who are going to succeed are the ones who choose innovation, maintain focus on the positive, and define new ways to do business. Will this be you?

“In a chronically leaking boat, energy devoted to changing vessels is more productive than energy devoted to patching leaks.”

Warren Buffett

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