



New Year's Resolutions for Your Practice

Since we received rave reviews on the New Year's resolutions featured in the December 2004 issue of *PMM News*, this year we bring a new set of resolutions for your pediatric dental practice. Whether you decide to encourage more referrals, reduce stress or get creative with employee recognition, these 10 bright ideas will have positive effects on your practice.

1. Review Your Employee Benefits Package.

Your goal is not to throw more money at employee benefits, but to get more value for your benefit dollars. At a staff meeting, ask your team members which benefits they perceive as most important so you can allocate financial resources to those areas. As a baseline, a survey with dental office personnel ranked employee benefits in the order of importance shown below:¹

1. Paid vacation days
2. Paid holiday leave
3. Dental care
4. Sick leave
5. Pension
6. Health insurance
7. Continuing education
8. Production bonus
9. Personal leave
10. Disability insurance
11. Life insurance
12. Professional dues

2. Protect Your Practice From "Presenteeism."

According to a recent article in *Harvard Business Review*, presenteeism is a far more costly problem to your practice than is absenteeism.² What is presenteeism? It is when employees are at work but not fully functional because of illnesses or other medical conditions. Presenteeism has been

estimated to cut productivity by over one-third in a typical work setting. The most common health problems affecting productivity in American workers are allergies or sinus trouble, flu, acid reflux disease, chronic lower-back pain, arthritis, depression and migraine. The recommended solutions are: (1) become aware of the particular health issues facing your employees; (2) educate employees to make sure that illnesses do not go undiagnosed; and (3) attend continuing education programs or sponsor lunch-and-learn programs on topics relevant to staff health issues such as diet, stress, mental health and chronic pain management.

3. Find an Excellent Stress Reducer. Of the estimated 550 million working days lost each year in America due to absenteeism, more than 50 percent are related to stress.³ Further, women experience more stress and more stress-related health concerns than men do, and women probably make up the majority of your pediatric dental team. To gain insight into better stress management this year, consider the list below of the Top 10 leisure activities of career professionals:

1. Watch television or a movie
2. Read a newspaper, magazine or book
3. Go out to eat
4. Exercise or play sports
5. Listen to music
6. Have sex
7. Spend time in organization meetings and activities
8. Visit friends or relatives
9. Go to church
10. Take a nap

Interestingly, the top items professionals said they *wished* they could do more often were exercise, travel, play sports, do crafts and hobbies and read a book.



4. Improve Your “Morning Huddle.” Of course you have a morning huddle, but are you spending the time wisely? Begin with a pleasant greeting to everyone (no matter how tempting it is to start with complaints about the weather or a “problem patient” on the schedule). Review the treatments planned for that day, noting any unique needs of specific patients. Highlight the names of the new patients. Discuss whether any patient scheduled for the day had a recent accomplishment, such as being accepted to college or winning a sports award. Mention any special assignments for team members. Try to close the meeting with a positive quote, thought or joke for the day.

5. Encourage Referrals. To promote referrals from parents in the practice, keep a supply of cards and practice brochures at the front desk, make sure every parent receives two or three business cards at least once a year and post a sign stating “We welcome new patients.” In addition, encourage your team to ask parents for referrals. For example, “I know it seems pretty busy here sometimes, but we always make room for the friends and families of our patients. If you send someone our way, we will take good care of them.” Or, “I wish we had more patients like your Jennifer. Don’t hesitate to pass our name along. Would you like a few of my business cards?” When you receive a referral from a parent, be sure to send a brief note of thanks.

6. Promote the Concept of a Dental Home. A recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) is that children receive an oral health risk assessment by six months of age and the establishment of a dental home by 12 months of age.⁴ You are on the front lines in terms of promoting this message to parents in your community. Whether you are having an informal conversation, giving a speech or writing a letter to the local paper, the following messages will help you communicate the concept of a dental home:

1. An oral health visit at six to 12 months of age can help babies get comfortable with the dental environment and give parents a chance to get to know the pediatric dentist in a nonemergency situation.
2. The benefits of prevention go beyond protecting a baby’s smile. Children with cavities in early childhood are less likely to attain their ideal weight and height and more likely to experience a failure to thrive.
3. Preschoolers and babies have a lower rate of dental visits than any other age group of children, and 20 percent of preschoolers have tooth decay. Finding a dental home with a pediatric dentist early

on will help protect children from dental problems that can limit their ability to eat and speak or distract them from learning and playing.

4. An early visit to a pediatric dentist can save parents money. Studies show that children who have their first dental visit before age one have 40 percent lower dental costs in their first five years than children who don’t, making preventive care a sound health and economic decision.

7. Get Involved With Legislative Activities. Of all dental practitioners, pediatric dentists treat the highest percentage of patients insured through public assistance and are the provider of choice for patients with disabilities. Therefore, pediatric dentists are the ideal people to work at a state level on such legislative issues as Medicaid funding. Less than one-half of one cent of every Medicaid dollar is spent on children’s dental care. A top legislative priority for the AAPD is to ensure that dental benefits under Medicaid for children and patients with special needs are protected. Your state-level dental organizations need your support to bring care to those who need it most.

An additional legislative issue strongly tied to pediatric dentistry is access to hospital care. When medical benefits for anesthesia are denied just because dental procedures are performed, families of children needing extensive dental treatment face serious financial burdens. If you live in one of the 20 states that has not yet passed legislation mandating insurance reimbursement for general anesthesia during dental treatment for children and the physically disabled, then your dental societies could definitely use your help.

For further information on the AAPD’s legislative activities and how to get involved, please log in to the *Members Only* section of the AAPD Web site (www.aapd.org) and visit the *Advocacy* section.

8. Review Your Practice Web Site. As you know, a Web site can promote your pediatric dental services to potential patient families. It also can offer valuable information to parents currently in your practice, and thus reduce some of your routine office phone calls. Review your Web site and consider the following points:

1. Is the Web site still accurate on such essential topics as hours, services, payment options and contact information?
2. Do you need to update the clinical accuracy of your dental health education? Can you expand your current topic listing to include such subjects as oral piercing, smokeless tobacco or fluoride varnishes?



3. Do you need to replace any photos? For example, if you have added new staff, remodeled your reception area or painted the exterior of your building, then your Web site photos may not match your current practice reality.
4. Children – your most important target audience – spend a lot of time surfing the Internet. Is the “Just for Kids” page within your site still appealing to a variety of age groups? Can you add such features as dental quizzes, puzzles, interesting oral facts or science project ideas?
5. Would adding advanced features to your Web site make it more valuable to your practice? For example, would you like to allow parents to log in and review treatment plans or make future appointments with an automated scheduling calendar? Talk to your Internet provider about the benefits, costs and technical considerations of newly available Web site functions, and check with your attorney about possible legal issues.
6. If you currently do not have a Web site, perhaps you should consider creating your own through the AAPD’s Member Web Site Program. This program is offered exclusively to AAPD members as a member benefit and allows you to update your Web site from the comfort of your home computer. In addition, no special Web knowledge is needed to create or maintain the Web site. For further information on the AAPD Web Site Program, please contact Web Site Assistant Tom McHenry at tmchenry@aapd.org.

9. Upgrade Your Treatment Area. Take your team on a tour of the treatment bay. What small (or large) changes would make it more attractive or comfortable for patients, parents and team members? Are your treatment chairs in top condition, or are they starting to look older than some of your staff members? Do the carpets, floors or furniture need to be cleaned or repaired? Has an influx of additional patients or equipment made work areas cramped and inefficient? When was the last time you changed your posters and other wall art? Does the area need new books, toys or movies to appeal to patients of all ages? Ask your team members for their perspectives and act on the most popular and realistic suggestions.

10. Get Creative With Employee Rewards. The following ideas for team recognition are drawn from “1,001 Ways to Energize Employees” by Bob Nelson.⁵

1. Take out a full-page ad in the local newspaper every year and thank every employee by name for his or her contribution to your practice.
2. Seek innovative, low-cost ways to help your team balance work and family. As you know, one of the toughest parts of working is simultaneously managing family obligations. Ask your team members to brainstorm 10 ideas on how the practice could help them balance their work and personal lives. Act on one of the ideas within 30 days.
3. Start a “Donation Day.” At McCormick Company, employees voluntarily work their normal shifts for no pay one day each year. (You could consider a half-day shift or a couple of hours instead.) McCormick donates double the employee’s wage to the charity of the employee’s choice. The employees’ win because they can donate to their favorite charities, and your practice wins the goodwill of the community.
4. Bring a Polaroid camera to work. Take candid shots of team members and post the results through the office.
5. Schedule a crazy sweater, silly socks or funny hat day with a joke prize for the winner.
6. Instead of giving out holiday bonuses in checks, give out cash instead. Close a few hours early and take everyone to a shopping mall. After the shopping spree, stage a show-and-tell.

Once you have chosen one or more of these ideas to put into action for the benefit of your practice, sit down with your team and generate your own additional New Year’s resolutions. The staff of *PMM News* wishes you and yours a very happy new year!

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