Three costly mistakes made by dental practices...and how to avoid them

The model for running a solo dental practice hasn’t changed much in decades. The dentist focuses on delivery of care, while delegating most—if not all—aspects of running the business to staff. This model worked as long as the business side wasn’t too complex.

In the old model, business flow was a series of straightforward tasks: perform the treatment, charge the patient, send the insurance claim on their behalf, fill out a recall postcard. The dentist didn’t need to spend much time overseeing these tasks once treatment was performed, and the staff didn’t need extensive business skills.

Today, such a simple flow doesn’t cut it, especially as the industry becomes more competitive with each passing year. Practices need structured processes and systems in place, with continuous monitoring. And dentists can’t afford to ignore office performance.

But that’s a challenge for most solo practice dentists, who don’t have the time (or the desire, understandably so) to continuously monitor and re-evaluate their business processes. Mistakes happen, balls are dropped, and problems persist for months before anyone notices.

Here are 3 common mistakes that can end up being very costly:

1. Poor patient retention

In many practices, patient communication happens by phone or by postcard, which requires a lot of staff effort and time. Diligent follow-up is required, and measuring results is difficult. Thanks to cloud technology, a number of automated patient communications systems now exist to help automate this process and measure performance. Staff can focus on other tasks, patient messages aren’t lost in the shuffle, and the dentist can pull a report in seconds to review all aspects of patient communication. Most importantly, patient retention increases.
### 2. Inadequate insurance knowledge during treatment planning

Successful case presentation is a critical success factor for any dental practice, and case acceptance rates are highest when the patient approves at the time of the treatment plan. The number one reason that patients don’t accept treatment is financial, and the easiest excuse is “let’s wait until we find out what the insurance will pay.” Checking patient insurance eligibility and plan benefits prior to the treatment planning appointment helps eliminate patient uncertainty about cost. The system to gather this information in most practices is time consuming and requires extensive manual inputs. Cloud services can completely automate this process, reducing burden on staff time and effort.

### 3. Ignoring unfinished treatment plans

Unfinished treatment plans are often referred to as the untapped gold mine in dental practices. Any time a patient has an incomplete treatment plan and fails to return to the office, follow-up should be immediate. A system should be in place to track all aspects of patient contact from the time of the initial appointment to when the treatment plan is complete. Patient information should flow directly into the recall system, to name one example of how an effective process can maximize practice revenue. Here too, the cloud has a solution—there are applications to monitor the status of treatment plans and flag those in need of follow-up.

It’s very difficult for a solo practice dentist to be both primary producer and CEO if the practice uses outdated practice management software. Planet DDS has harnessed advances in cloud technology to offer practice management software that eliminates costly inefficiencies like the ones described above—all in a single, integrated platform. For more information, don’t hesitate to reach out to us to learn more at sales@planetdds.com.