

THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: HYGIENE

By Roger P. Levin, DDS



See
The Last
Page For An
Exclusive
OFFER

Levin Group^{Inc.}



THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: HYGIENE

By Roger P. Levin, DDS



In consulting relationships with more than 24,000 dental practices since its founding in 1985, Levin Group has developed high levels of knowledge and skill in all areas of practice management and marketing, which we refer to as *The 9 Areas of Expertise*:

1. **Production**
2. **Collections**
3. **Team Building**
4. **Scripting**
5. **Case Acceptance**
6. **New Patient Experience**
7. **Hygiene**
8. **Scheduling**
9. **Marketing**



This whitepaper explains how a dental practice's hygiene department can drive both short-term and long-term increases in production.

The Practice-Building Potential of Hygiene

Just as patients need to understand that a hygiene visit involves much more than "just a cleaning," dentists need to see the hygiene department as a major contributor to practice success.

The hygiene appointment presents unique opportunities for the practice to build relationships with patients, based on the role played by the hygienist in providing care for patients. Before looking at how the modern dental practice can modify its approach to hygiene to take advantage of these opportunities, we should look at the hygiene department's sources of power and potential.

- **Regular hygiene visits provide continuity in patient-practice relationships.** Imagine how difficult it would be to form relationships if patients scheduled appointments *only* when they had dental problems or wanted to find out about elective treatment. Patient loyalty, trust and willingness to make referrals all come easier when rapport exists. With patients coming in every six months for hygiene care, everyone on the practice staff—not just the hygienist, but the doctor and other team members as well—are able to form lasting connections with patients.
- **Hygiene appointments allow time for in-depth communication.** Typically, the hygienist spends 40–60 minutes with each patient. Though a number of the procedures she performs require her undivided attention, there are other periods when the hygienist can talk with the patient—not only providing education about proper home care but also relationship-building and motivation for accepting treatment and referring new patients.

THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: HYGIENE

- **The hygienist often becomes the patient's primary personal contact within the practice.** Many patients spend much more time with the hygienist than with the doctor or anyone else in the practice. In this sense, she becomes the "face" of the practice and can therefore exert greater influence on patients' behavior and perceptions.

These factors make it clear that implementing effective new systems and scripting in the hygiene department can have a profound impact on overall practice success.

It Begins with Getting Patients into the Chair

Obviously, the benefits of a well-prepared hygiene department cannot be realized unless the practice's scheduling system consistently brings patients in for treatment. There are five proven techniques for accomplishing this:

1. Use scripting to build value for the hygiene appointment.

A November, 2014, research brief from the American Dental Association¹ reported that the second biggest reason (32.7%) adults do not visit a dentist (cost being the first at 40.2%) is that "they do not need dental care." This seems to suggest two things: that these patients think they will *know* when they need care, and that there is no reason to visit a dental office for routine, preventive treatment, i.e., hygiene services.

This attitude about the value of a hygiene appointment—the belief that it has no value—can and should be corrected with scripting. All staff members should be prepared to refer to hygiene with such terms as "periodontal maintenance" and "oral cancer screening," never just "cleaning." The hygienist and doctor should also find opportunities to explain that regular hygiene visits help *prevent* dental problems from occurring... and that only dental professionals can properly identify early-stage issues that need attention.

2. Keep active patients scheduled at all times.

Before patients leave after their hygiene appointment, they should be scheduled for their *next* hygiene visit. In some practices, this is handled by the hygienist, while in others the front desk coordinator schedules patients at checkout. Either approach can work well, as long as scripting is used to encourage patients to leave with an appointment rather than getting to it later.

3. Confirm appointments systematically.

Contact patients 48 hours before they are expected at the practice to "confirm" their appointment (rather than "reminding" them about it). If they say they will not be able to make it, this may give the scheduling coordinator enough time to refill the vacated time slot in the schedule. The cancelling patient should also be rescheduled at this time.

¹Why Adults Forgo Dental Care: Evidence from a New National Survey; C. Yarbrough, K. Nassah, M. Vujcic; Health Policy Institute, American Dental Association; November, 2014

THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: HYGIENE

Confirmation should be done via cell phone, email, texting or work phone to increase the likelihood of actually connecting with the patient. Some practices have improved results with the confirmation process by involving the hygienist in contacting the patients.

4. Follow-up with unscheduled patients.

If patients are not scheduled for the next hygiene appointment during their last visit, the scheduling coordinator or hygienist should reconnect with them within 24 hours to prevent them from becoming significantly overdue. The longer they go without a hygiene appointment, the greater the danger of them deciding they don't really need to see the hygienist regularly.

5. Reactivate inactive patients... starting with a hygiene appointment followed by an examination by the doctor.

Working with numerous clients, Levin Group has found that most practices can reactivate 85% of their inactive patients by implementing a multi-phase activation program. Working with lists of patients who have not had hygiene appointments for 12–30 months, front desk staff should make contact—first by cell phone, then by text, email and letter if needed—in an attempt to get these overdue patients scheduled to see the hygienist. Scripting should make it clear that the patients' health is the primary concern and that problems such as gum disease, oral cancer and the early stages of tooth decay or damage can only be detected by dental professionals.

Conclusion

The practice-building potential of your hygiene program cannot be overstated. As the providers of most of the routine clinical care patients receive—and as the staff members who can most readily build strong patient-practice relationships—hygienists hold the key to long-term practice growth and success.

The *9 Areas of Expertise* cover every aspect of successful practice operation. By learning about these areas and seeking professional coaching and training to enhance all nine skillsets, practice leaders can grow their practices—and increase their personal satisfaction—in today's challenging economy.

THE 9 AREAS OF EXPERTISE: HYGIENE

Dr. Roger P. Levin

Dr. Roger P. Levin is a third-generation general dentist and the Chairman and CEO of Levin Group, Inc., the largest dental practice consulting firm in North America. A keynote speaker for major dental conferences, Dr. Levin presents more than 100 seminars per year. He has authored 68 books and more than 4,000 articles. In 2014, he received the Dental Excellence Award for Best Practice Management Consultant from *DrBicuspid.com*. For the past 12 years, he has been named one of the "Leaders in Dental Consulting" by *Dentistry Today* magazine.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

The Platinum Library

Get all of Dr. Roger P. Levin's best-selling e-books in one easy-to-download purchase. Learn the practice management and marketing essentials for growing your practice from the foremost authority on the business of dentistry. **Save 10% when you purchase these books as a set rather than separately.** Go to: www.levingroup.com/store/libraries.html.



The Practice Performance Analysis™

Get the peace of mind you deserve, with a Levin Group Practice Performance Analysis™. More than 6,800 dentists and specialists have used this analysis to gain a better understanding of their practices and increase production.

The analysis is conducted by a Certified Practice Analyst at your office with minimal interruption to your business operations. During the assessment, the analyst will examine your practice's operations... pinpoint under-performing areas... and give you solutions for increasing production. Special price is \$1495, a \$500 savings.

To find out more, call 888.973.0000 or visit www.levingroup.com/analysis.

