

# THIS HYGIENE SCHEDULE IS DRIVING ME CRAZY

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Do you have more white spaces in your hygiene schedule than you would like? Paying your hygienist for time without a patient is NO FUN. It takes the whole team to keep the hygiene schedule full and it starts at the top. Ask yourself and your team the following questions to see if you really have the system, values and accountability you need to keep the hygiene schedule full.



1. Doctor, are you so concerned in these tight financial times that you jump into operative treatment and then send the patient to hygiene? This is a value question. As the dentist, you must communicate the value of your hygiene services. The patient needs to hear from you that a healthy foundation is crucial before operative care begins. (Disclaimer - opt out for those patients with pain or critical care needs.)

2. Doctor, have you discussed your treatment philosophy and expectations of the hygiene care part of the practice with your hygienist(s)? If a hygienist has not been given specific guidelines and held accountable for those, she can often turn the hygiene visit into a social visit and a mere "cleaning." Neither builds value for the patient. The pillars of a valuable hygiene visit begin with an evaluation of the patient's dental conditions and oral health fitness. Then, a specific visual display of any conditions that need attention. The hygienist should be empowered to discuss and motivate the patient about the importance of taking care of any conditions and the value of their return for periodic re-evaluation and professional hygiene care. And, lastly, you should reinforce the actions needed by the patient to obtain, regain or maintain oral health including their return to hygiene. This discussion should include a personalized reason for the patient to return to the hygienist(s) at the appropriate interval. The dentist holds great weight in reinforcing the patient's return in 3, 4, or 6 months.



3. Doctor, do you have a specific recall system that you have assigned to a business staff member? Have you provided the training for them to use all of the valuable resources available to them to keep the hygiene schedule full and with a waiting list ready to fill last minute openings? These resources include complete training on the full use of your computer system's recall system implementation from the software trainers, tutorials and manuals. Next, are they using all electronic resources to inform patients of their appointments or overdue status including texting, emails, calls, cards and letters? And, do they have a consistent system of follow-up for patients who are overdue? And, do you periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the recall system? (see #6)





4. Doctor, (OMG, me again) have you set the expectation that it is NOT OK to have holes in the hygiene schedule for tomorrow. A hole in the schedule first thing in the morning will turn into more openings during the day. The standard and acceptable level of performance is that every available hygiene appointment has a patient in it for tomorrow. The business staff not the hygienist(s) are primarily responsible for making this happen.



5. Doctor, have you set the expectation that the hygienist without a patient is responsible for assisting with recall by calling overdue patients. In today's world of ultrasonics, there is no time allowed for ye ole disappearing hygienist who says she is "sharpening instruments."

6. Doctor, have you "crunched your numbers" to determine your recall effectiveness, your open time rate in hygiene and the cost associated with this, your perio in hygiene numbers and your hygiene profitability numbers? You cannot fix the hygiene schedule by stabbing in the dark. First, know your numbers compared to benchmarks; then, you have a place to focus and to show improvement and to hold the team accountable. PS- if you need a guide for this contact me [jenniferm@dentalmanagementadvisors.com](mailto:jenniferm@dentalmanagementadvisors.com).



A full hygiene schedule is the foundation of a good practice.



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Nationally recognized as a speaker in the area of practice management and technology integration, Jennifer has presented to the American Dental Association, the Yankee Dental Congress, as well as regional meetings and study clubs. She enjoys teaching new dentists how to start-up a practice “the right way” with her annual courses for the Medical College of Georgia and the University of Alabama at Birmingham’s School of Dentistry. Her articles on business and technology solutions have been published in JADA – The Journal of the American Dental Association, Dental Economics, Dentistry Today, Dental Products Report, and Alpha Omegan.

Jennifer is a member of TAG (Technology Alliance of Georgia) and WIT (Women in Technology). From single-doctor start up practices to group practices, her combined management and technology expertise offers a well-rounded approach to improving efficiencies and effectiveness (and de-stressing) the dental practice.