

TOP 5 CONCERNS

(and responses) to Assisted Hygiene (A/H)

By Linda Miles

Change is hard. And when it comes to assisted hygiene, concerns prevail, making change even harder. Because A/H can benefit your practice enormously, I offer up solutions to the five most prevalent concerns.

1 What will patients think of this change to assisted hygiene?

Patients accept what the dentist and team members accept first. In order to get patients on board with A/H, the entire team must discuss and understand the benefits to patients, i.e. more patients can be brought back for preventive care. They must understand the benefit to the practice as a healthier business.

Let me offer the following example: Suppose you add 110-120 more hygiene patients per month (15 per day with two chairs and a designated assistant versus 8 patients per day solo). This (at \$150 per patient average) is an increase in production of \$1050 per day, not to mention the operative found in those "floating recalls." Because hygiene is a third of total production, this can increase revenue by \$50,400 per month (based on a four-day week). This rounds out to an annual increase of more than \$600,000, counting operative work found in those additional patients.

Simply put, the team must understand the benefit to themselves and to the doctor. Emotionally, they should feel good knowing more patients can be brought back in a timely fashion. Financially, at 22% of collections, the team might have an additional \$11,088 per month to share in salaries and benefits. The practice at a 40% profit margin would net an additional \$200,000 after expenses. A great rate of return in more ways than one!

2 Will it cause dentists to be overly busy with more hygiene checks per day?

Not all dentists can keep up with two busy days of their own as well as check multiple hygienists if they are

accustomed to one hygienist with eight patients each day. The solution is to have one day per week of ONLY hygiene. If the dental practice has four chairs, all four are hygiene patients one day per week. SUPER HYGIENE DAY! Two hygienists with two assistants can see approximately thirty patients in one day with no operative. Dentists like this four days per month super hygiene versus the additional checks per day. Four days of Super Hygiene is equivalent to 16 days of solo hygiene.

3 I'm the assistant; will I feel demoted?

One of the main factors in successful A/H is finding two professionals who respect the part the other plays in A/H. If the hygienist acts superior in any way, the assistant feels undervalued/demoted. If each professional trusts and praises each other to the patients and feels good about their roles, feels good about A/H, and feels proud to be part of this Dynamic Duo, it works like magic.

4 Will the care by the assistant be sub-standard to the hygienist's?

Just as in any new position, the dentist and the hygienist must be supportive and train the assistant in this new role within 21st century hygiene care. Making a checklist for the hygienist and one for the assistant will be helpful in making sure both parts of the A/H team are not only fully trained but also fully understand how this system can work as smooth as silk when both parties are 100% focused on the benefits to patients, the practice, and each team member.

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5 Will our office look and feel like an assembly line?

Assisted hygiene can add whole new dynamics of smoothness to patient care with proper training and the support of all. One of my favorite seminar lines is: "You don't have to be slow to be good." Efficiency comes from making a plan and working the plan with great attitude. Staying focused on patient education from both the hygienist and the assistant will prove to patients this is a good new model of patient care. If proper planning is not done before A/H is started, as with anything else, results will be minimal.