

DENTAL REVENUE DIGEST

Tips & Resources for Dental Practice Success

January 2022 | dentalbilling.com

The Evolution of Dental Clinical Documentation.

This is a major revenue cycle management roadblock.
pg 18



Creating Your Business Gameplan for 2022. You can make 2022 your best year ever. pg 12

Overcoming the Dental Staffing Crisis. What does it mean for the state of dentistry? pg 04

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6 Strategies to Reduce Stress and Stay Productive

Strategies to maintain smooth operational processes while you are working short-handed.

pg 24

contents



Overcoming the Dental Staffing Crisis

Unfortunately, there is no escaping the fact that there is a nationwide staffing crisis. But what does this staffing crisis mean for the state of dentistry in 2022?

Greg Grobmyer, DDS
Practice Booster

09

Getting 100% of What the Doctor is Owed

Talk about "pulling teeth" to get a claim paid!

10

How Reference Materials Can Decrease Claim Denials

Improve claim reimbursement, treatment planning, and more.

12

Creating Your Business Gameplan for 2022

Now is the time to create the winning game plan for you, your team, and your patients.

18

The Evolution of Dental Clinical Documentation

Good, comprehensive clinical notes are crucial to sending clean claims.

22

eAssist Recognizes Dr. Eric Peterson

and the team at Peterson Dental with a Top Practice Award.

24

6 Strategies to Reduce Stress & Stay Productive

Strategies to maintain smooth operational processes while you are working short-handed.



OVERCOMING THE **Dental Staffing Crisis**

Article by **GREG GROBMYER, DDS**

Unfortunately, there is no escaping the fact that there is a nationwide staffing crisis. But what does this staffing crisis mean for the state of dentistry?

A recent poll by the American Dental Association's Health Policy Institute (HPI) in August 2021 indicates that patient volume in private dental practices is up to pre pandemic levels. This same poll uncovered that 32% of dental practice owners are actively seeking dental hygienists for their practice and 39% are needing to hire dental assistants.¹ These numbers are equally exciting and scary. Let's dive into the process changes and culture improvements that can be implemented in your dental practice to overcome the dental staffing crisis.

Hire for office culture, not experience

Part of the dental staffing crisis is the inability to find experienced individuals to fill positions in the office. A common hiring mistake dental practice owners make is putting too much focus on the years of experience that the candidate possesses.

Dental terminology, proper scheduling, treatment plan presentation — all of these can be taught. At the end of the day, the success of the dental practice hinges on patient satisfaction. Try turning your focus to some of the attributes of potential team members that will enhance your office culture and patient experience. Look for applicants that show:

- Positive attitude
- Clear communication skills
- Empathetic & caring persona
- Active listener
- Approachable & friendly
- Creative problem-solver

Once you hire your team based on your office culture, then you can shift your focus to nurturing your team. A team that will boost the success of your practice will have lifelong learning mindsets.

¹Source: Dentistry iQ, Dental staffing shortage: 'Huge' struggle continues

Do you already have at least one existing team member with that mindset? Loop them into the hiring process, get their feedback, and proactively formulate the right interview questions to ensure you hire more team members that want to learn and grow with your practice.

You still need experience on your dental team

Even with the right office culture in place, you still need dental billing experience on your team. But you're thinking, "I just overcame the dental practice staffing crisis by hiring for office culture." Your patients are having incredible experiences, accepting treatment plans, trusting your team, referring to their friends and family... It seems like your practice is on the fast track to success.

So why do you need dental billing experience? There is a definitive level of trust that you give to your dental team to keep keen eyes and firm hands on your revenue cycle management, but that doesn't mean that an extra set of eyes isn't beneficial. After all, everyone is human. Human errors and mistakes aren't uncommon but can delay consistent — and necessary — cash flow to the practice. This is especially true if you focus hiring on culture fit instead of experience. A large part of the patient experience in your dental practice is trusting that your team will perform the dental billing processes accurately and in a timely manner. Likewise, a large part of the success of your dental practice relies on the same.

Value and support employees

The most common reasons that a dental practice team member doesn't accomplish a task is because he or she is unsure of the entire scope of the task, the desired outcome wasn't clearly communicated, or the team member didn't have the tools and support needed to complete the task. The tools needed to complete tasks look different for every member of the dental practice team, but here are a few major tools that all team members need to be most efficient and effective:

- A practice management software that matches the needs of the practice
- Up-to-date CDT coding guides
- Best practice and protocol recommendations

Don't forget that when there are wins, you should celebrate them! No matter how big or small, take a moment to celebrate the wins that are moving your practice in the right direction.



Celebrating these wins in your morning huddle is a great way to positively start the workday for your team. You can also use gift cards, gourmet coffee, team lunches — there are many ways to show that you value your team and want to celebrate their success.

Train and develop current staff

You've heard the adage, "People leave managers, not companies." But is this true? Unfortunately, yes. Over 60% of people have voluntarily left a job because of their boss and not due to their position, responsibilities, or pay. What does this mean for you and the dental staffing crisis? Well, if you are a private dental practice owner, you essentially are the manager of your own small company. So you will want to take measures to ensure that you aren't the manager that employees want to quit.

If you have hired team members with lifelong learning mindsets, you can start by fostering those mindsets! Encourage lunch & learns, on-demand CE courses, leadership books, cross-training team meetings, etc. to help your team grow in their roles.

If you see a team member that really shines in a specific area (e.g. treatment plan discussion), grow their role around that strength. When your team succeeds, your practice will succeed — and employees that feel valued and supported are more likely to remain in their position.



Having a hiring and on-boarding process

You may think that having a hiring and on-boarding process is less of a concern during a dental staffing crisis, but it actually holds more importance than you think. Hiring can seem complicated, even without a staffing crisis, but with the right processes in place it can be simplified.

Over 60% of people have voluntarily left a job because of their boss and not due to their position, responsibilities, or pay.

Utilize dental industry experts

Certain daily dental practice tasks can bog your staff down and take up the majority of their time, so they feel like a hamster on a wheel. Dental teams have the incredibly difficult task of balancing patient care with regular daily tasks needed to ensure consistent cash flow. These shouldn't work against each other, and this level of stress certainly doesn't help a retain a team during a dental staffing crisis.



The solution to overcoming the dental staffing crisis while still continuing to grow your practice is to outsource your dental billing processes to dental industry experts. This allows your in-house team to focus on what truly grows the practice, while your cash flow remains consistent.

eAssist Dental Solutions is the nation's leading dental billing platform that has the experts you need on your team to keep revenue cycle management consistent, dental billing processes streamlined, and your dental team focused. 🧑‍💻

You can learn more by emailing team@eassist.me, calling 1-844-327-7478, or clicking [here!](#)

Curious how eAssist works? Watch this short video:

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Buying Power was founded by dentists for dentists. We understand that practice owners have a lot on their plate and practice expenses can add up quickly. We enable private practice owners to compete in today's market with access to benefits typically reserved only for corporate dentistry. Our commitment is to help members stay focused on the patient experience while providing peace of mind and greater profits. Buying Power Best Practice Solutions gives you the quickest path to increased success.

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Jon Pluid Dr. / DMD, Meridian, Idaho

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The Buying Power Process

1. You enroll as a member of Buying Power.
2. Our team negotiates the best deals on the best products & services in dentistry.
3. We pass our savings on to you and our 2000+ members.
4. Gain access to the collective mindshare of 2000+ dentists to learn how they increase productivity and profitability while eliminating expenses.
5. Your practice saves money on the supplies, technology and services you need to thrive.
6. Overhead and expenses decrease and you no longer have to price-shop or negotiate with suppliers.
7. Your practice profitability and income increase.



GETTING 100% of What the Doctor is owed

Article by **BELLA ZARITSKY**, eAssist Success Consultant

I had a Delta Dental claim that was for four impacted wisdom teeth with IV sedation. It was initially sent to Delta, but Delta required a medical EOB for these specific procedures. The medical insurance took 4 months to process the claim and send the denial for all services rendered on that date of service.

I sent the dental claim, along with the medical EOB, to Delta Dental for processing. Delta remitted payment for one of the extractions, but nothing more.

I called and spent over an hour on the phone explaining what had



happened, and the representative finally agreed to send the claim back for reprocessing and promised it would be paid correctly this time. When the next check came from Delta, the EOB showed the remaining three extractions, but did not include the IV sedation.

Another long phone call — over an hour and a half this time — explaining that the IV was not paid.

A few weeks later, another check comes from Delta that includes two of the four units of IV. A third — and 2 hour — phone call to a Delta supervisor and the final check was issued for the remaining two units of IV sedation. The claim was completely processed 6 months after the procedures were performed. Talk about “pulling teeth” to get a claim paid!

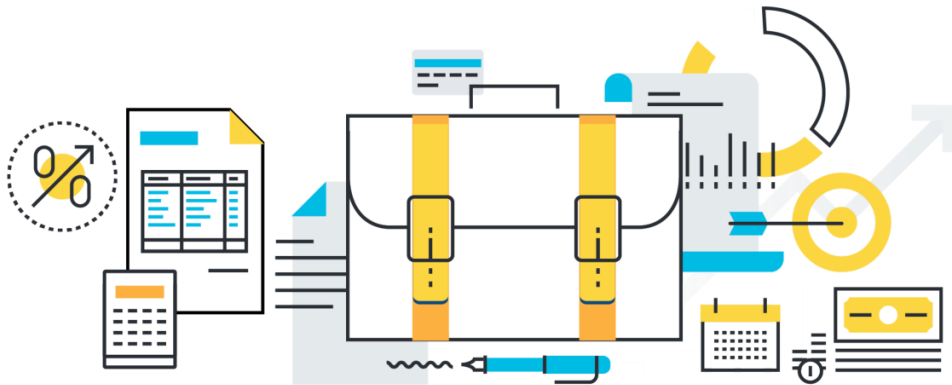
Get 100% of what you are owed from insurance payors

You need dental billing experts on your team that know when (and how) to appeal claims to get you 100% of what you are rightfully owed.

[CLICK HERE!](#)

HOW Reference Materials CAN DECREASE CLAIM DENIALS

Article by **NINA LEWIS**, eAssist Team Leader Director



A

PPROXIMATELY 65% OF DENTAL PRACTICES

are participating with dental insurance, dental billing processes are crucial to revenue cycle management. There are 7 common claim issues that lead to unnecessary insurance claim denials and delays, which cause huge roadblocks in steady cash flow. The first of these issues is denials due to inadequate reference materials. So let's dive into how to reference materials can support your dental billing specialist and decrease unnecessary claim denials in your dental practice.

➤ Why are reference materials important?

Insurance codes change and update every year. Not only are CDT & ICD-10 codes added and removed, but important nomenclature and supporting documentation changes are made. Do you know what that means? If dental billers are not apprised then it opens the door to denied funds to your practice.

This is where billing & coding reference materials are crucial. Not only do up-to-date coding materials support your dental billing specialist, but they can also significantly decrease unnecessary claim denials due to

incorrect coding or supporting documentation. Investing in current, complete, and accurate billing reference materials each year will improve claim reimbursement, treatment planning, and more.

➤ What coding reference material is right for my practice?

The industry's leading coding resource is Coding with Confidence by Dr. Charles Blair. This resource is guaranteed to help dental billers confidently send the proper, updated code on the claim — with all of the required documentation — for timely reimbursement. The ADA also has a coding reference available for dental practices.

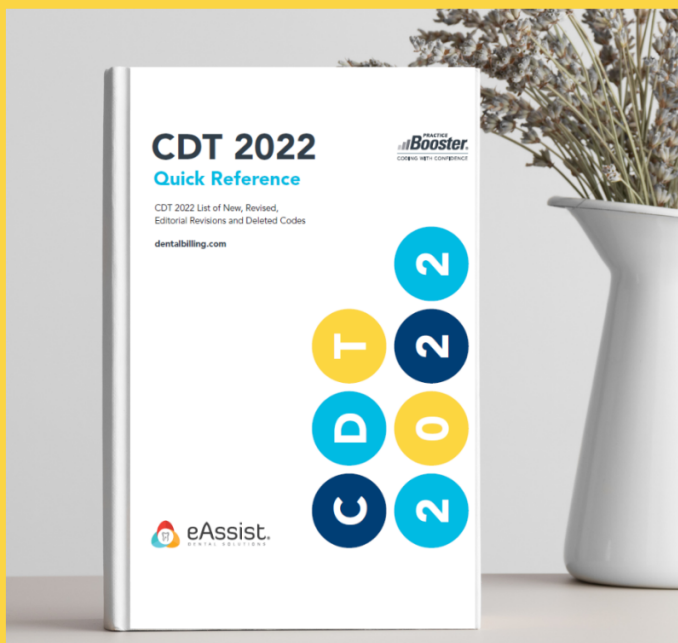
DID YOU KNOW?

eAssist dental billing clients receive a subscription to Practice Booster just for being one of our valued clients. This is just one of the many ways we support dentists, and their teams, from day one.



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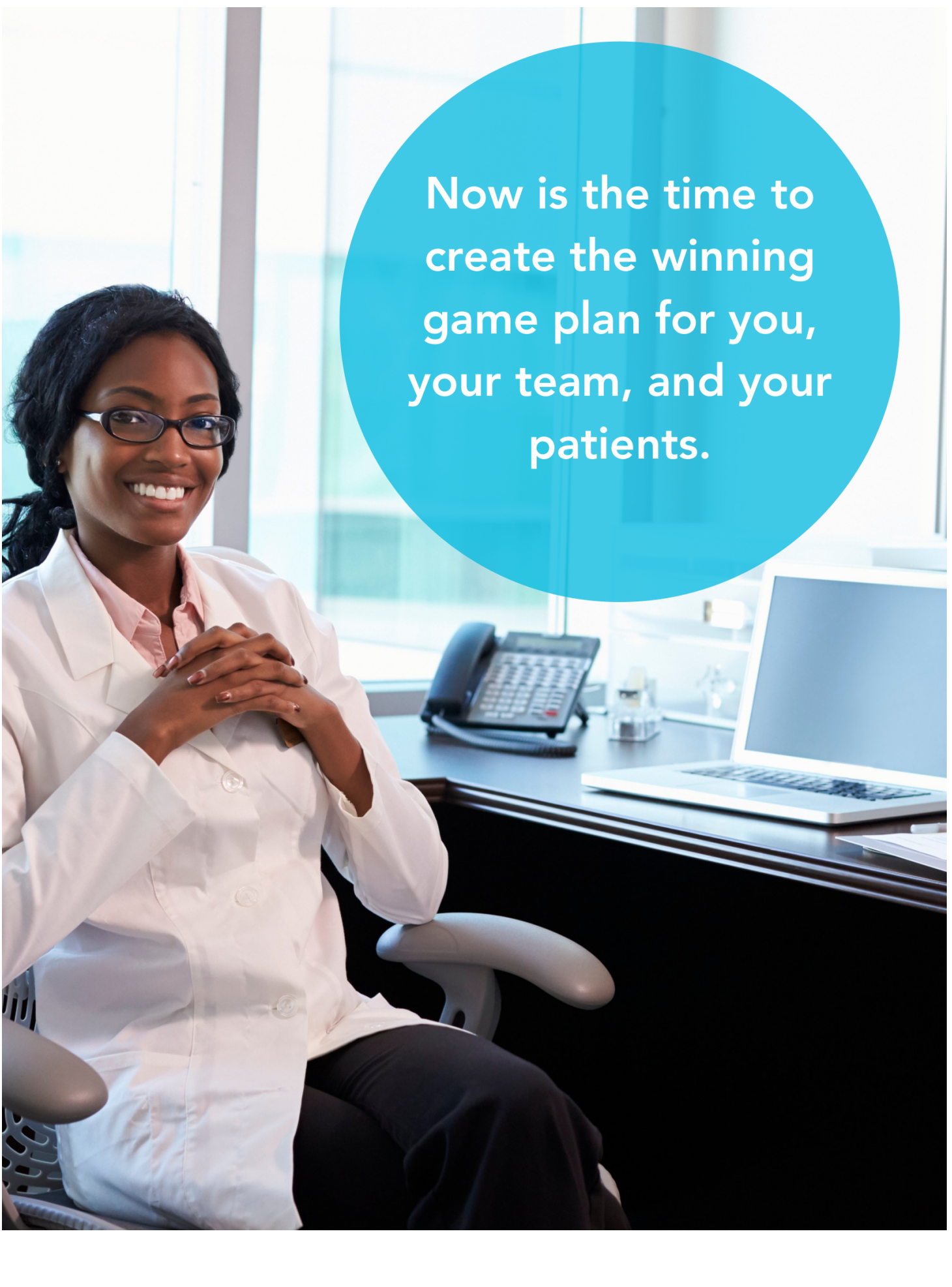
Or email LearnMore@eassist.me, or call 1-844-327-7478



Do you have the 2022 CDT codes?

Stay up-to-date on the 2022 CDT code additions, revisions, and deletions with this user-friendly resource. Save to your front desk computer for easy access, click on the section you want to view in the Table of Contents, and enjoy having the most recent CDT information at your fingertips.

DOWNLOAD

A smiling female doctor with dark hair and glasses, wearing a white lab coat over a pink shirt, sits at a desk. Her hands are clasped in her lap. On the desk are a black office phone, a laptop, and some papers. A large blue circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text. The background shows a window with a view of a city.

Now is the time to
create the winning
game plan for you,
your team, and your
patients.

CREATING YOUR Business Gameplan for 2022

**As Head Coach of the Seattle Seahawks Pete Carroll says,
"To accomplish the grand, you have to focus on the small."**

—Article by **BRENDA BARBOUR**, Productive Dentist Academy —

Your best year ever

can be 2022. What does your best year ever look like? Most dentists close their eyes and hope for 2-10% growth. Using a generalized, shotgun approach like this will put you on a treadmill and will do little in moving the dial for building long-term value.

Top-performing dentists know how to activate change by using this time of year to map out strategies to achieve specific growth. Now is the time to create the winning game plan for you, your team, and your patients.



Reflect on the year. Celebrate your wins, note what needs to be calibrated, and ask yourself:

**Is 2022 the year
I commit time to
working on the
business, not
just in the
business?**

- What type of mindset am I leading my team with? Abundance, scarcity, optimism, or pessimism?
- Is this the year I add to our service mix?
- Am I just riding the wave, or am I going to take a stand for a change?
- Will I perform like the top 5% of dentists and be intentional about building value?

Here are three key elements you can harness to create your winning game plan for 2022:

Forecasting business growth: Get specific

Just like a football team, your growth strategy includes multiple elements

Forecasting is being able to visualize goals for increased new patients needed as well as actual results on production and collection.

including the players, equipment, competition, and fans (patients). For example, let's say you want to expand your service mix next year. You would want to plan each play involved in the service mix:

- What CE courses will you attend?
- What is your plan to consistently train your team so the knowledge is integrated?
- What new marketing tactics do you want to use to target new patients?
- How will you create new brand awareness in your community?
- What type of profit do you anticipate this new service will bring into the practice?

At Productive Dentist Academy, we know establishing your dental practice's Profitability Incentive Point (PIP) is key. This means discovering beyond your breakeven point.

It includes:

- Debt pay-off strategies
- Including an additional 10% return on investment for owners
- Taking 5% and putting it into savings

To properly forecast growth, you will want to determine the annual growth production desired, minus your average adjustments, to determine your needed monthly net production. Break these down to what your hourly production must be, by provider, to achieve both your PIP and practice growth goals.

Exceptional patient experience requires your leadership

Maintaining status quo stagnates growth. Successful dentists continue to embrace the core belief that extending extraordinary patient experiences starts from within. Consistently seeking new ways to add value to the patient



Make 2022 your best year ever!

Let's get you there



experience through relationships and community involvement is key.

According to the BRM Institute, scientific studies show that the words you use affect others on a psychological level and play an important role in outcomes.

For example, do you value your hygienists as diagnostic partners that can provide preventative care or periodontal gum therapy? Or do you view them as merely maids that provide cleanings and check-ups? The words you use with the team are heard by patients, and most importantly, can be energetically felt by all. By embracing a team mindset, one where every member participates in improving the health of patients, you foster patient health advocacy.

Patient Health Advocacy shows up in each and all team member's daily roles and duties, elevating roles and ultimately the value of oral healthcare entirely.

Are you envisioning and positioning your team as:

- Guides who help patients through the entire process including screening, diagnosis, treatment and follow-up appointments

- Resources that ensure patients have the necessary information they need to make the best decisions for themselves regarding their health
- Navigators through the complex world of working with insurance companies, employers, case managers, and outside vendors for financing and treatment services

- Supporters who listen to the patient's concerns and personal considerations, suggesting alternatives that work for the patient

Successful dentists schedule annual planning time with the entire team because they know A-players want to understand the game plan. Utilize your team strengths to mastermind what's possible with regard to practice growth.

Goals are far easier to achieve when you are in the game together. Discuss team incentive desires as

growth is achieved. When you empower the team to give input and share in the rewards, ownership takes on an entirely new meaning.

Analyze for efficiency

If you can see it, you can track it. If you can track it, you can measure it. If you can measure it, you can improve it.

If you've ever looked at other dental practices and wondered how easily they seem to have "the right people" in "the right positions", look to the leadership in the practice.

Systems

Evaluate for effectiveness and efficiency. Pay close attention to the impact each system has on practice growth and profit. What areas can you improve?

Scheduling

Are you using an effective template to achieve your goals? Is it being followed consistently?

Treatment Acceptance

What percent of patients say yes to your treatment plans? What percentage are completing treatment? If it is below 20%, and your accounts receivable is below 1x the annual monthly production, chances are your financial options are too rigid, and patients aren't getting as healthy as they could.

Financial Options

Does your practice make it easy for patients to say yes to care? Are all financial options offered currently creating a healthy cash flow for the practice?

Accounts Receivable

Revenue cycle management is critical. For example, standard billing AR over 90 days should be less than 9%. In insurance aging, there should be zero claims over 60 days. What correction strategies can you immediately implement?

Recare

Understanding your patients, and how they best prefer to be communicated with, massively improves your chance at success. Communication isn't about you, it's about how your target audience prefers to be communicated with. What campaigns do you have in place for communicating with patients that need additional care? Are all your patients expected to respond to a text?

Marketing

Are you tracking your marketing efforts? Are you attracting the patient that allows you to practice the services you most enjoy?

Are you diagnosing and achieving ideal treatment acceptance, or are you attracting new patients that do not need dentistry? Evaluate your marketing budget to properly allocate funds needed to attract both the volume and type of patients you desire. Then track your return-on-investment of all marketing.

The ability to recognize and acknowledge new perspectives are a prerequisite to growth. The team that shows up to play at the Super Bowl does not win by themselves. It's the coaches on the sidelines, seeing the big picture and guiding the success of each play, that ensures the win and takes home the trophy.

By getting specific, analyzing your opportunities, empowering your team, and pulling in industry expert business guidance, you can plan, take action and reach new heights of success in 2022. 🧠

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THE EVOLUTION OF **Dental Clinical Documentation**

Article by **CHARLES BLAIR, DDS**

Our research has uncovered that many dental offices do not document as thoroughly as they should.

No matter the reason — and usually the reason is not having enough time — this is a major revenue cycle management roadblock. Insurance carriers are constantly changing their guidelines for reimbursement, making clinical documentation even more critical. Do you feel that your current level of dental clinical documentation is helping or hurting your insurance reimbursement? If your clinical notes aren't quite up to par, or maybe needs just a little bit of refining, we have several tips to help you.

Comprehensive dental clinical documentation

Good, comprehensive clinical notes are crucial to sending clean claims. And how do you keep anything in life clean? SOAP, of course! SOAP is an easy-to-remember acronym for writing dental clinical documentation that dentists learn in school. The goal for following this acronym is to make sure all of the

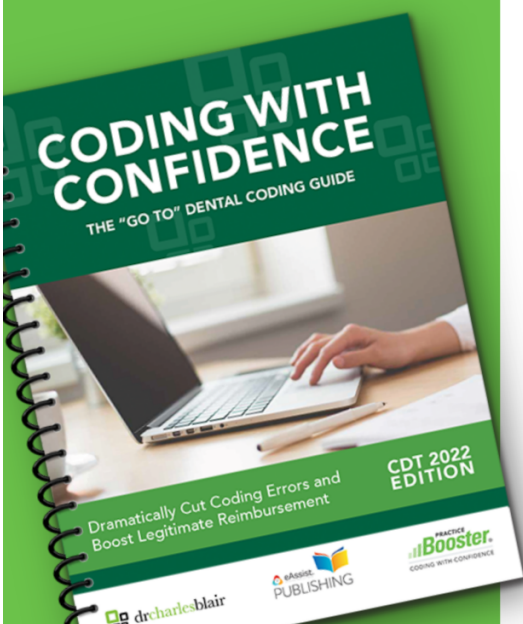
necessary information is documented in the clinical note that is needed to support the claim for the procedures performed — and to appeal the claim, if necessary. SOAP stands for:

- Subjective — the patient's chief complaint as communicated by the patient, history of present illness, location and severity
- Objective — vital signs, examination findings
- Assessment — diagnosis, reasoning/evidence behind diagnosis, if applicable
- Plan — how the provider will treat the patient's concern

Did you know that comprehensive clinical documentation begins with the patient's initial phone call to the office to schedule an appointment? It is important to be clear in your questions to the patient to understand what the patient's dental needs and expectations are for their appointment. Any time a patient is in the office — or

PUT AN END TO COSTLY CODING ERRORS ONCE AND FOR ALL.

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on the phone — it is recommended to record patient statements word-for-word in the clinical notes, whether they are related to chief complaints, treatment, or financial arrangements.

Narratives and clinical notes are now one in the same

The days of writing novels to get claims paid are over! Many payors are now only accepting a narrative to document medical necessity if it comes in the form of clinical notes taken directly from the patient's dental clinical documentation? This means that good, comprehensive clinical notes are now necessary to get claims paid.

The patient's clinical documentation is a legal record of the patient's dental health in your practice, so the hard truth is that if it isn't documented, it didn't happen. While this is helpful in terms of no longer needing to write an independent summary of the patient's visit to get a claim paid, it can be detrimental to your

practice's cash flow if your dental clinical documentation is lacking the information required for maximum reimbursement from the payor.

Open up and say cheese!

We've all heard the phrase "A picture is worth 1000 words." Intraoral photos are quick and easy pieces to the insurance puzzle that many dental practices don't include. Not only do they help increase case acceptance — because a patient can see what you see — they also maximize reimbursement from payors when they can clearly see why the treatment was performed.

Oftentimes, what can't be observed clinically can't be seen on a radiograph. Intraoral photos can be the determining factor in whether or not you get full reimbursement for the services performed. Remember that if it's not documented, it didn't happen.

Photos are your tangible proof of medical necessity.

Know when (and how) to appeal

Approximately 33% of denied claims are appealed for reimbursement, which means that dental practice revenue is being left on the table unnecessarily. Then one of two things happen: 1) a write off is done, or 2) a statement is sent to the patient. This creates frustration for everyone, and can cause patients to distrust your processes and team. Payors send copies of EOBs to the subscriber, which means patients can see if a service is denied and why.

Does your designated dental biller know the difference between rejected, disallowed, and denied claims? This is the first step when deciding whether an appeal is necessary or if there is something else needed.

Rejected claim

A rejected claim is one that is kicked back because there is something on the claim form that can't be processed. The claim needs to be reviewed for accuracy, corrected, and resubmitted. Rejected claims are avoidable roadblocks to timely

reimbursement and can be easily resolved with complete and accurate insurance verifications.

Disallowed procedure

When a procedure is disallowed, the payor has determined that it doesn't qualify for reimbursement per the designated plan. Disallowed procedures are not billable to the patient and will need to be written off. Explanations of benefit (EOBs) that state services rendered are disallowed procedures can be very frustrating for both the provider and the patient if they are unexpected.

Denied claim

When a claim is denied, the payor has determined that the claim does not qualify for reimbursement and the reason will be stated on the explanation of benefits (EOB). If the claim is denied because of missing information or filing errors, that is a reason to appeal!

Have dental billing experts on your team to help

Dental teams have the incredibly difficult task of balancing patient care with a long list of daily tasks needed to ensure consistent cash flow.

Dental billing processes are getting more complex and time consuming, taking hours upon HOURS of time to chase down the information needed to ensure reimbursement from the payor. These hours should be spent on more important areas: treatment presentation, financial arrangements, scheduling, marketing, etc, etc.

The solution is to outsource your dental billing processes to dental industry experts that know the ins and outs of insurance payors and their requirements. This allows your in-house team to focus on what truly grows the practice, while your cash flow remains consistent. 🤖





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- **Working your aging claims until your over 90-day A/R is at \$0**
- **Timely follow-up on all outstanding insurance balances**
- **Appealing denied insurance claims** for you
- **Complimentary enrollment in Dental Buying Power**, a powerful discount collective
- **Daily & weekly accountability reports**
- A team that is motivated to help you collect 100% of what you are rightfully owed from insurance carriers to **make 2022 your most profitable year ever!**



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**TOP
PRACTICE
AWARD**

eAssist Recognizes **Dr. Eric Pe** *and Team with Top Pr*

Article by **AMANDA CROSS**, eAssist Director of Marketing

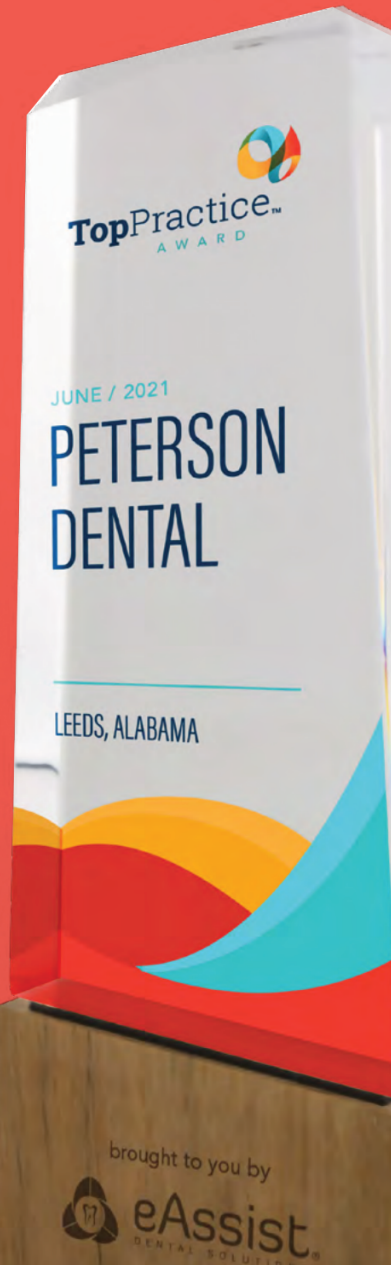


Dr. Eric Peterson and the Team at Peterson Dental are eAssist's most recent recipients of the Top Practice Award. This honor is awarded each month to two exceptional eAssist clients who embody the values of integrity, expertise and grace, while providing exemplary patient care, running efficient operations, and giving back to their communities. Presented to the practice as a whole, the award recognizes the need for a cohesive unit to run a practice to the highest standards.

THE MANTRA AT PETERSON

DENTAL is well-known to their patients – “Chickens have no teeth; don’t be a chicken.” In other words, they ensure the experience is so friendly, affordable and simple that no one should be scared to have the dental care they need and want. Brave dental children are rewarded with a trip to the “treasure box,” while brave dental chickens of all ages are awarded a “chicken sticker.”

“When I opened Peterson Dental in 2010, I looked for ways to help everyone feel less nervous and more at home,” explained Dr. Eric Peterson. “So we greet everyone with a warm, welcoming smile; have a comfortable lobby complete with coffee bar and bottled water; our comfortable, modern patient rooms include super-soft, massaging and heated dental chairs; and we can play the patient’s favorite music, movie or TV show to help them relax. We even



Peterson

Practice Award!

painted the walls soothing colors... because the patient's comfort is that important to me."

Dr. Peterson graduated from The University of Alabama with a degree in Mechanical Engineering, then attended UAB Dental School where he was elected President of The American Student Dental Association. Ever since, he has regularly attended lectures and continuing education courses to stay abreast of latest dental health techniques, equipment, and advances in pain-management.

Continuing education combined with more than 150 years of cumulative experience in the dental field, means the Peterson Dental team of two doctors and 8 staff can be trusted to provide outstanding care. And, by being qualified to perform such a wide variety of procedures, they can in most cases take care of all the patient's needed treatment in their office without having to make referrals.

In addition to comfort, the team excels at making a visit to the dentist easy and convenient. They're open Monday through Friday, use state-of-the-art

equipment to take instant digital x-rays, break down complicated insurance details so they are easy for the patient to understand, and offer financing options for those without insurance.

Dr. Peterson knows that patients have many oral health providers from which to choose, and takes it as a personal complement to be given the opportunity to treat his patients how he would want to be treated – like family. He takes the time to explain all aspects of the care being provided, and ensures the patient is comfortable. Moreover, he considers getting to know his patients one of the best aspects about being a dentist.

The entire team at Peterson Dental regularly receives rave reviews on social media, and many patients take the time to send notes or emails directly. Dr. Peterson takes none of these for granted, acknowledging them on their website:

"Thank you to all of our wonderful patients for these incredible recommendations on Facebook, Google reviews and sent in by email. Your support and appreciation means the world to us!"

About Peterson Dental



DR. ERIC PETERSON AND THE TEAM AT PETERSON DENTAL

offer a family-focused approach to provide comprehensive dentistry serving the greater Leeds area, and other eastern suburbs of Birmingham, AL. Services include preventive care, general and cosmetic dentistry, performing a wide range of procedures that minimize the need for outside referrals. They welcome patients of all ages, accept many insurance plans, and offer financing options.

6 STRATEGIES TO REDUCE STRESS AND STAY PRODUCTIVE

— Article by **KAY HICKEY**, Consultant at Zirc Dental Products —

I am an efficiency consultant with Zirc Dental Products, Inc., where we manufacture products to help dental practices become more efficient, safe, and happy. I work with practices daily, and one of the biggest concerns I hear is the difficulty they are experiencing while having to work short-staffed. This has been an issue well before Covid-19, but the pandemic certainly exasperated the problem.

IMAGINE getting to work at the dental practice to discover your co-worker called in sick. You might feel bad that they are sick, but then it hits you, you are working short-staffed today. You immediately look at the schedule and see it is heavily booked. As a former dental assistant, I can still remember that feeling of my sinking heart, and rising anxiety. It's going to be a tough day. I would quickly try to recover

and put myself in "just get me thru this day" mode. Now, imagine coming into this kind of environment every day, maybe for weeks, or even months!

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"Since the pandemic, dentistry lost over 10% of its workforce."

DR. GARI KADI

Many of you are dealing with just that, and you are in good company. There is a significant shortage of dental professionals, including assistants, hygienists, office administrators, and dentists!

► Emotional and financial stress

The following stressors from working short-staffed can cause burn-out, lost revenue, and frustrated teams and patients.

- Running behind schedule
- Decreased production
- Continuous training (Temps, subs, family members, cross training team members)
- Inefficient inventory management
- Increased cost of supplies
- Missing items at chairside
- Poor patient perception
- Stressed, unhappy team

- Non-compliance (OSHA and maintenance schedules)
- Increased employee turn-over
- Salaries increased and employees working over-time

The good news is, there are some strategies to maintain production while we are working short-handed.

Bonus! Once you have a complete team back in place, these strategies will make you even more productive than you were before!



1. Morning Huddle

Be sure that the entire team is present for a morning huddle. Spend fifteen minutes at the beginning of the day to check in with each other and see how everybody is doing. During this time, you will review the schedule from the day before and see if there were any hiccups. A quick discussion will prevent those same pain points from happening repeatedly. Review the day's schedule and look for

potential bottlenecks. Discuss the best place to add in emergency patients.

2. Re-evaluate procedure times

Track how long it takes from set-up to tear-down of a procedure when you are working short-staffed to estimate accurate appointment times. Track the times for at least one week and figure out the average time spent. You may need to consider temporarily adding in a little extra time into each procedure. I understand we don't like to do this, but it may be necessary to prevent patients and/or employees from leaving.

3. Cross-train

For example, in a pinch, assistants should be able to schedule appointments and answer phones, just like administrators should know how to get a treatment room set-up and reprocess instruments. When we are missing team members, we must have each other's backs!

4. Evaluate your clinical systems

Do you find that you: must go to multiple areas to find what is needed for a

procedure, can't quickly locate what is needed, are finding an abundance of expired materials? Perhaps you are running behind schedule, or working late to get caught up. If so, it is time to consider making some changes. Zirc's Color Method is a simple color code system that identifies each procedure with a different color for quick and accessible material and instrument management.

The Color Method has been proven to save time and money, increase efficiency, and create a stress-free, cohesive environment. It can be implemented in five easy steps:



GET COLORFUL

Assign each procedure a different color.

INSTRUMENT MANAGEMENT

Utilize cassettes, bur organizers and procedure trays with locking covers to keep everything together and organized from set-up to sterilization.

MATERIAL MANAGEMENT

Procedure tubs become portable drawers for procedure-specific materials. Tubs will reduce: the amount of inventory on hand, missing materials at chairside, and lost or expired materials.

STERILIZATION CENTER

Make it the hub of the practice. Store tubs with materials, trays with the instrument set-ups, and extra inventory for tub restocking. Simply grab a blue tray and a blue tub, and you will have everything needed for the procedure. I call that "grab and go organization!"

TREATMENT ROOMS

Countertops should be free of clutter. Utilize the drawers or cabinets to store disposables such as cotton products, gloves, saliva ejectors, etc.

5. Dental devices

A hands-free isolation/evacuation device is a must for a dentist working without an assistant. It should provide a bite-block, tongue retraction, cheek protection, and high-volume evacuation.

This will allow the dentist to be able to prep and restore a tooth without having an assistant at chairside. Zirc's Mr. Thirsty One-Step® does just that! It hooks directly into the HVE valve and provides hands-free isolation to maintain a clear, dry field. The dentist can perform high quality, yet efficient dental care, even in the absence of their assistant.

Mr. Thirsty is pre-assembled, disposable, and requires no additional equipment or set-up fees. Once the practice hires a dental assistant, they will appreciate the added flexibility a device like Mr. Thirsty can offer. Let's face it, assistants do a whole lot more than wrangle tongues and suck spit! Wouldn't it be nice if the doctor could start a procedure while the assistant attended to one of the many tasks, they have in their repertoire?

6. Technology

Start by looking at your existing dental software. Many times, there are features that you may not know exist that could help the team work more efficiently. I encourage you to do some research to see what is available to streamline systems to free up time for the team. There are so many options available, below are a few that have been recommended to me:

- ▶ **Zen Supplies:** A web-based platform that manages inventory down to a single cotton roll! It processes the ordering of supplies, manages back-orders, and controls your budget, with very little man hours spent.



WORKING SHORT-STAFFED? Six Strategies to Reduce Stress & Stay Productive

If you enjoyed this article, you won't want to miss out on Kay's amazing, on-demand Dental Zing course dedicated to remaining efficient when your staff is not at full capacity. Click below to learn more!

ENROLL



- ▶ **eAssist Dental Solutions:** The nations leading dental billing platform! They will verify insurance benefits, send clean claims, follow up on accounts receivable (insurance & patient), post insurance payments, and more! Imagine the time that is freed up so the office administrator can focus on patient care and other tasks.
- ▶ **Revenue-Well:** An all-in-one dental practice marketing and patient communication platform. It provides online scheduling, automated appointment confirmation, online patient forms, and bill payment, freeing up a ton of time for your administrative team.

Working short-staffed doesn't mean that our days must be chaotic or unproductive! Implement some strategies that will provide a sense of calm as we weather out the storm. Sometimes challenging times is what is needed to force us to make improvements in our work practices. The team can be happier and more productive whether working short-handed or not. 🧑‍🎓





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