



Hygiene

How to Help Your Hygienist Increase Production

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A thriving hygiene department is a sign of a busy restorative practice. There are several steps you can take to maximize productivity in the hygiene department.

1 Provide the right equipment

In the same way that you need good equipment and the right tools to treat your restorative patients, your hygienist needs all the right tools and equipment, too. A power scaler with ample inserts/tips is a necessity! Hygienists cannot do their jobs well with broken, worn-out hand instruments, yet too many hygienists struggle to get through their day trying to “make do” with substandard instruments. Too many doctors feel their hygienists’ clinical needs are secondary and make hygienists feel like they have to resort to begging to get what they need. Doctor, if you want your hygienist to be productive, make sure the right tools to do the job are readily available.

Another way to increase production is to provide an intraoral camera and the necessary training to use it. An intraoral camera in the hands of a good communicator makes a great communicator. If your hygienist needs training, schedule a staff training session at a staff meeting with different people taking turns using the camera on each other. An intraoral camera is an excellent way to show patients where restorative needs exist.

2 Implement assisted hygiene

Consider how productive you would be if you had to do everything solo — operatory set-up, chartings, treatment, cleanup, and sterilization. All the ancillary duties involved in patient care but not directly related to “hands-in-the-mouth” treatment take time. If you had to work without the benefit of a qualified assistant, your production would

most likely be half or even less than what it is with an assistant. It is the same with hygienists.

The assisted model has three necessary prerequisites:

1. Two equally equipped treatment rooms
2. A dedicated hygiene assistant
3. Proper scheduling

There can be no compromise on the prerequisites. For example, if there are two available operatories but only one power scaler, the assisted model will not work. It is not feasible to constantly move equipment from one treatment room to another throughout the day.

Another thing that will truly sabotage the assisted model is when the doctor hires an additional assistant and expects that assistant to help the hygienist *and* doctor at the same time. I have witnessed hygiene assistants that are called away from helping the hygienist to help with restorative procedures. The hygiene assistant is sometimes perceived by established assistants to be *their* assistant and expected to do whatever they want him or her to do. Doctor, how would you feel if your chairside assistant was not available when you needed him or her but was off in another part of the office helping someone else? You can only imagine the consternation of the hygienist when the hygiene assistant is not available to help the hygienist because that individual was pulled away to help someone else. The hygiene assistant must be dedicated to the hygiene department. The *only* time the hygiene assistant will be available to help elsewhere is if there is downtime in the hygiene schedule. Hygiene assistants are vital to keep the scheduling flowing smoothly and the hygienist on target.

An assisted hygiene model can be ruined by over scheduling. A hygienist who typically sees eight patients per day in a solo model can easily see 12 patients per day in an assisted model. In a regular 8-to-5 day with an hour for lunch, a hygienist working an assisted model can comfortably see 12 to 14 patients per day, depending on the procedure mix. If you are concerned about the extra cost a hygiene assistant will add to the salary overhead, consider

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how much an additional four to six patients in hygiene can add to the production!

Table A: Hygienist without an assistant. Assume eight patients per day, four days per week for a 32-hour week, two cancellations, and hourly pay at \$35 per hour.

Average cost of dental hygiene appointment: \$100 (excluding doctor exam)

32 patients X \$100 =	\$3,200
Subtract 2 cancellations	- 200
TOTAL	\$3,000
Subtract salary	-1,120
Subtract benefits (10%)	- 112
GROSS PROFIT	\$1,768

Table B: Hygienist with an assistant. Assume one patient per 40 minutes, 32-hour week, four cancellations, and hygiene assistant salary at \$15 per hour.

48 patients X \$100 =	\$4,800
Subtract four cancellations	- 400
TOTAL	\$4,400
Subtract hygienist salary	- 1,120
Subtract assistant salary	- 480
Subtract benefits (10%)	- 160
GROSS PROFIT	\$2,640

Solo profit: \$1,768 X 50 weeks = \$88,400

Assisted profit: \$2,640 X 50 weeks = \$132,000

\$132,000 - \$88,400 = **\$43,600** additional profit with assisted hygiene.

Assisted hygiene allows hygienists to:

- ✓ Devote more time to each hygiene patient
- ✓ Increase diagnosis time, allowing for discovery of more restorative needs and more cosmetic work
- ✓ Eliminate much of the stress brought on by squeezing too many hygiene appointments into each day, particularly when only one operator is being used for hygiene treatment
- ✓ Be more effective in delivering therapeutic services

3 Communicate your desires regarding the promotion of restorative procedures from the hygiene chair

Doctors have varying philosophies regarding staff promotion and treatment recommendations from staff members. Your hygienist needs to know if you want him or her to discuss cosmetic or other treatment options. Further, for the hygienist to be able to speak confidently about such treatment, your hygienist needs to participate in the learning process. Set aside time for him or her to observe you rendering key procedures that you wish to have promoted. Allow your hygienist to accompany you to continuing education courses about restorative dentistry.

4 Treat your hygienist respectfully as a fellow producer and health-care professional, and share the wealth

Hygienists who feel appreciated and respected by doctors are more than willing to promote restorative procedures. It gives a hygienist a great feeling of satisfaction to know that he or she is contributing to the success of the practice. And, to quote a great piece of wisdom from Linda Miles, CSP, CMC, "Above-average doctors do above-average dentistry, charge above-average fees, and pay above-average wages." If the hygienist is compensated well, he or she is more likely to work hard to be worthy of those wages. Praising your hygienist in front of patients from time to time is like applying fertilizer to a crop. For the hygienist, praise from the doctor is like receiving a hot meal on a cold day. A good word from the boss can make a staff member "glow" all day! Indeed, all your staff members need to hear praise from you regularly.

Final thoughts

The most profitable general practices are those with a busy, thriving hygiene department. Hygienists should play a pivotal role in helping patients understand the need for restorative dentistry. The challenge for doctors is to provide all the necessary elements — tools, scheduling, training, and praise — and create a working environment that is conducive to continual growth and learning. **DE**

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Doctors, what are your thoughts on assisted hygiene?

Would your practice benefit? Do you currently employ a hygiene assistant?

Do you plan to hire a hygiene assistant in the future?

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