



DUST OFF THAT INTRAORAL CAMERA

By: Janet Steward

How many times a day is the intraoral camera used in your practice. Twenty? Ten? Never? You know the benefit of dramatically increased case acceptance. What was so clearly visible to only you is now visible to the patient as well and, as the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. You are painfully aware of the cost. Intraoral cameras are not cheap. Many dentists would love to invest in having them in every treatment room but don't because those that they currently have are not being fully utilized. How frustrating is it when this expensive piece of equipment becomes a dust gatherer?

How do you get your team to use the camera on virtually every single patient? You could issue an edict instructing your assistants and hygienists to use the intraoral camera more often. The first day things are usually a little better. The second day they are not as good and the third day, your practice is back to the same old thing. People begin with good intentions; they really do. Sadly, the busyness in the day usually catches up with them and the best of intentions fall by the wayside.

What are you, the dentist, to do about it? You could fuss and gripe, moan and groan and try to bludgeon them into shape. This approach may work for a while until your ulcer starts acting up as all this micromanaging wears you down. Isn't there some system that you can put into place that you won't have to micromanage? Here are six steps you can implement today that will achieve 100% use of the intraoral camera, a dynamite wrap-up from the team at the end of each appointment and dramatically increase your case acceptance.

1. One of the traits of effective leaders is that they are crystal clear. It starts with a clear expectation from the doctor to the team that they will use the camera with every single patient. Every time you sit down to perform an exam, you should expect to have one or more intraoral pictures displayed on the monitor. If a patient does not have any restorative concerns, show periodontal concerns such as calculus buildup or bleeding. Take a picture of the crown you just seated on number 31 to show how great it looks and matches up with the tooth next door. Use it with children to show them the results of disclosing solution highlighting where they are having difficulty brushing.
2. The assistants and/or hygienists keep track of two things during the day: (a) the number of patients they saw, and (b) the number of times they used the camera. They give this information to the administrator at the end of each day. The administrator enters the data into a simple spreadsheet that tracks the percentages. You can create your own spreadsheet or send an email to info@themanagedentpros.com for a complimentary one.
3. The third expectation is that the assistant and/or hygienists will display the pictures for the exam. In the beginning, the dentist may need to give a gentle reminder such as, "I can see you are not quite ready for me. Why don't I do my other hygiene check and come back when you have taken some pictures of that tooth?"
4. All this leads to an incredibly powerful wrap-up by the assistant and/or hygienist that you can easily track on the same spreadsheet. Things get hectic and the clinical team is often rushed. It is common for an assistant or hygienist to talk to the patient about their next appointment while they are gathering up the patient's chart, raising the back of the chair, removing the bib and ushering the patient to the front desk. Keep in mind that 55% of everything we perceive comes from body language, 38% from tone and pace and only 7% from the words we say. Talking to a patient



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about their next appointment while you are walking them up to the front desk loses a lot of its impact. Focus is a magical thing, takes hardly any time, increases case acceptance and reduces missed appointments. Here is how it works. When the doctor leaves the treatment room, the assistant or hygienist should sit facing the patient, eye to eye with their mask removed and ask, “What questions do you have about the treatment that Doctor recommended?” When any questions or concerns have been answered, the assistant or hygienist says something like, “I’m going to take you up to the front and Amy will schedule you for two appointments. The first one will be for your professional cleaning and the second will be for those three fillings on the left hand side.” They, and only then, do they remove the bib and escort the patient up to the front desk.

5. Tracking your results is the final component to this system. The numbers speak for themselves. While there may be some ‘fudging’ of the numbers, it can’t be too far off or else you will know about it. Review the individual percentages during a staff meeting. Celebrate your success. Consider a \$50 bonus for everyone if the practice as a whole achieves 95% compliance.

The results will speak for themselves. You, the doctor, will become the macro-manager instead of the micro-manager. The system runs itself. What a relief. We commonly find that practices that put this system in place go from 0-10% camera usage to 85-90% camera usage. Imagine what that does for your case acceptance when patients can see for themselves what their broken down tooth looks like. Imagine what it does for missed appointments. They are dramatically reduced because patients really *feel* the sense of urgency. In addition, you have a team that is taking the time to promote your treatment recommendations in a way that was not possible before. Try it; it will make a difference in your practice.