



RULES TO REDUCE CAVITIES ON OUR EARTH

by Lynda Sherman

Each day we focus on conquering tooth decay. The morning huddle is where we begin to acclimate the team and set expectations.

Who are we treating today? What treatments are we performing?

The operatories are organized and prepped in advance to welcome the day's patients. The ultrasonic is filled. The autoclave has started. The lights and equipment are on, and the thermostat has been changed three times already.

With all this preparation, has anyone given a thought about the decay and decomposition about to be dumped upon the Earth?

Patient care will always be our first priority. However, regardless if it is a simple prophylaxis or a complex surgery, prioritizing sustainability does more than benefit the planet, it benefits patient health. How can we make dentistry more environmentally friendly? It is not difficult to make a difference.

Five areas that can be addressed easily:



1. REDUCE ENERGY WASTE

There are easy ways to reduce energy consumption and costs inside the dental practice. Switching to LED bulbs will save 75% electricity, compared to incandescent bulbs. They last 25 times longer and contain no mercury. Turn the lights off when not in use. Use motion sensors and timers to eliminate illuminating unoccupied space. Unplug idle electronics: breakroom coffee pots, microwaves, curing lights, and autoclaves. Plugging these items into a power strip and turning them off when done is a simple, yet effective, way of reducing energy waste.



2. BE DIGITAL

Paperless dentistry is the new normal, and there are many benefits to the digital world.

A virtual office system not only reduces cross contamination but reduces our carbon footprint. Making paper requires trees, water, and machinery. This waste can be eliminated by simply utilizing computers in the office. From billing to patient charting and radiography, working digital reduces the need for not only paper, but also chemicals used to copy information and develop x-rays. Increased efficiency is also a huge perk with digitized patient data. All patient information is found in one portal that can be accessed by all computers in the office.

Computers consume the most energy in the practice. During office hours, allow computers to go into sleep mode when not in use. When leaving for the day, opting to shut down completely versus using a screensaver will reduce energy waste. If, however, your IT company requests computers remain on during non-working hours, turn off monitors to eliminate screensaver mode.



3. PROCEDURE PREPARATIONS

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail" is a famous quote by Benjamin Franklin and speaks truth about practicing sustainability. Consciencely reducing dental waste should be a priority within your practice. Preparedness for your next patient and procedure will greatly reduce unrecyclable, non-biodegradable items. Glove usage contributes to the majority of dental waste in landfills. How many times a day are you changing gloves? How about your auxiliary team? This is not referring to necessary glove changes. How many times are gloves changed unnecessarily, due to unpreparedness? The handpieces were not on the tray; fluoride was forgotten in the drawer; not enough anesthetic was set out; saliva ejectors were not restocked. Scissors are always needed for crown procedures, yet frequently forgotten. Can you relate to this scenario?

Encourage team members to create a procedural checklist with photographs of the items needed for each procedure. When it is time for treatment, your focus is on the patient, eliminating the need to re-glove to obtain more items.



4. REDUCING PLASTIC WASTE

Let's go naked. Ever notice how many items are covered with plastic, yet still require the removal of a barrier and disinfection anyway? Noncritical patient care items, such as chairs and radiograph head/cone, do not require plastic barriers. Clinical contact surfaces such as light handles, trays, and computer equipment may be cleaned and disinfected without covering them in unnecessary plastic. Hand sanitation is the first step in reducing the transfer of microorganisms, but cleaning followed by disinfection with an EPA-registered hospital disinfectant is adequate. Reduce plastic waste by allowing some equipment to go naked.



5. RAISE AWARENESS AMONGST TEAM MEMBERS AND PATIENTS.

There are plenty of reasons to have a green dental practice, including increased employee morale and more confident, loyal patients. First, create an environmental mission statement, and display it for employees and patients to see. Next, set aside time at staff meetings to discuss your green efforts. Designate a team leader as the Green Team Liaison. Finally, keep patients informed about your green efforts by including updates in newsletters and social media posts. Sustainability is a current issue; and utilizing it for marketing awareness is a win-win situation for you, your patients, and the planet.

Adopting policies and practices with an eye on greater sustainability is the future of environmentally responsible dentistry. A few simple considerations will contribute to an improved environment and become a point of pride for your business. So, the next time you walk into your dental practice, will you be supporting healthy people living on a healthy planet?



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Quote-Worthy

“What’s the use of a fine house if you haven’t got a tolerable planet to put it on?”

— Henry David Thoreau



Ask the Consultant

Q: A patient recently passed away. Her daughter is asking me to transfer her mother's credit to her own account. When we told her we will transfer the money to her mom's account, she said they have closed her mom's accounts. What if she has other siblings?! So, we asked her to come to the office to sign papers that she received the money. She hasn't called us back since then. What should we do with the money in the account?

A: If I am understanding you correctly, the patient has passed away and the daughter of the patient is seeking transfer of monies (presumably patient credits or over-payments) to the daughter's account.

Under CA law, the answer depends on the patient's estate. If the patient did not leave behind more than \$150K worth of assets that do not automatically transfer, then the daughter as next of kin could file an affidavit for collection of personal property. Such affidavit cannot be delivered until 40 days following the death of the patient. The affidavit further has required statements that the daughter must make before you can release funds.

If, however, the patient left behind assets with a value greater than \$150K, then a formal probate proceeding will be required under CA law. In this instance, the daughter or someone else would need to file a petition for probate and for the issuance of letters testamentary (if there is a will) or letters administrative (if there is no will). The court will have a hearing on the petition and issue an order. Upon issuance of the order, then the court clerk will issue letters. Upon the issuance of letters of administration, then you can pay any monies belonging to patient's estate by issuing a check to the executor/personal administrator.

By the way, those bank accounts are similarly frozen.

Response provided by **Kathleen Johnson**, President of Kathleen Johnson Consulting, Inc.

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FUN! Fact

**Americans are the world's
#1 trash-producing nation,
accounting for 30%
of the world's waste,
despite having only
5% of the world's population.**

Service Savvy

Multiple Benefit Plans

Q: When I am searching for benefits on the Trojan database, I sometimes come across more than one set of benefits for the same employer. How do I know which is the right one for my patient?

A: When there are multiple plans to choose from, Trojan lists additional information in the second line of the employer address and in the Notes and Limitations area. There are many examples where you may encounter this:

- Preferred or Non-Preferred
- High Option or Low Option
- Salaried Employees or Hourly Employees
- Employees Only or Spouse and Dependent Children

Here is an example of one of the ways this information may be listed:

**BOBS BARBECUE ROASTERS
NON PREFERRED
1234 MAIN ST
ANYTOWN, TX 54321**

Multiple benefits could exist for the same employer. This information is also listed on the second line of the employer address. Here are some examples:

- Sub and Branch numbers: **Sub 25, Branch 001**
- Division numbers: **Division 32**
- Categories: **Category 99A**
- Plan letters: **Plan DL**

Here is another example of one of the ways this information may be listed:

**AMERICAN WIDGET PRODUCTS
SUB 55, BRANCH 001
1234 BIG CITY ST
ANYTOWN, PA 65432**

*After you have verified your patient's eligibility, and are still unable to locate a particular plan in the system, please call our Customer Service Department and we will be happy to assist you.
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— T.B., Treatment Plan Coordinator



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