

5 Hygiene Benchmarks to Strengthen Your Practice

by Kirk Behrendt and Kay Huff

"Stop setting goals. Goals are pure fantasy unless you have a specific plan to achieve them." — Stephen Covey

"When I sign up for a triathlon, I follow a rigid training program to make sure my body is prepared for race day. If I run, bike, and swim with no training strategy in the weeks leading up to the event, there is no guarantee I will cross the finish line in one piece. My training program serves a specific purpose: to help me monitor my progress over the weeks so I will be strong enough to cross the finish line on race day." — Kirk Behrendt

Dentistry is no different.

We see a lot of practices wasting time and energy without any guarantee they are getting closer to achieving their goals. They have signed up for a triathlon so to speak, *without* a training plan. Teams share fantastic intentions when we first meet, but just like signing up for a triathlon, the goal is "pure fantasy" if there are no measurable benchmarks.

We've had thousands of conversations with clients over the years; doctors always want to know how they compare. Are their production numbers greater than their competitors? Are they seeing as many new patients as they should? We love these questions because it means doctors and teams are motivated. They are eager and possess good instincts about the need to measure success. If a practice is struggling, the problem is rarely lack of motivation. Nor is it having too big a goal; the struggle occurs because practices don't have established benchmarks to help them get there.

The heart and soul of a thriving practice: Hygiene

No matter the office goal, whether greater production per hour or more time with family, the hygiene department is an essential place to have well-defined benchmarks. For potential impact, hygiene is one of the most important areas of the practice. Unfortunately, the department is often overlooked. We teach that hygiene is the gateway through which most restorative patients begin a lasting relationship with a practice. It is essential to a thriving practice to have a strong and measured hygiene department.

Hygiene benchmarks to strengthen your practice

1 30-35% of overall production should come from hygiene.

If you don't know how much of your overall production is coming from hygiene, break down your procedure analysis report to see where the bulk of your production lies. You must analyze how often you are doing comprehensive oral exams and complete periodontal documentation.

2 30-40% of your hygiene production should come from perio.

Of the 30-35% of production coming from hygiene, 30-40% of that should be from perio. Often, practices are not having the educational conversations chair-side with patients like they should. Whether a scheduling issue or a confidence issue, we see far too many patients slip through the cracks. You should spend





no less than 30 minutes with each perio patient. A favorite motto we teach our practices: *No perio. No production.*

Take the time to review the conversations your team is having chair-side. Are you educating people or just chatting about the weather or their last vacation?

3 Your total hygiene production should be 3X the hygienist's total compensation.

This is an absolute must. If production totals are coming up short, ask if you are performing too many 'heroic prophies.'

4 92-95% of your hygienist schedule should be full.

Downtime is dangerous. If you are seeing more than 5-8% downtime, it's a sign you are struggling. If you need to boost your patient flow, review your existing active patients who may be past due. Contact them by text, direct mail, or phone. In your morning huddle, take a few minutes to name patients coming in that day who are past due for hygiene. Do patients have family members past due? Find out and make contact. Remember that patients who are active but never had a hygiene appointment will not show up in your recall system. Identify them, and get them scheduled.

If you lack slots to schedule patients, it may be a sign you need to extend hygiene hours.

5 97% of your patients should leave the practice scheduled for their next hygiene appointment.

Don't let patients walk out the door without scheduling their next appointment. A simple change in phrasing can make the difference between hitting 97% and not. Don't say, "Would you like to schedule your next appointment now?" This leaves the patient open for a million excuses. Instead say, "Let's get that next appointment scheduled."

Make the impossible, possible

If you find you are falling short when comparing yourself to these five hygiene benchmarks, it may be time to re-evaluate your systems. While a difficult thing to do initially, practices find great things happen with self-reflection. If you want to make the impossible possible, you must be willing to self-evaluate and determine solid benchmarks. Don't spend another day expending energy and time without knowing if your efforts will help you cross the finish line.



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