Ten Myths about
PAPERLESS DENTISTRY

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Paperless Dentistry *is* happening. It is either going to happen *to you* or you can make it happen *for you*. You can believe the myths and spend a small fortune on software and gadgets or you can debunk those myths and use some of the easy, free methods suggested here.

1 "PAPERLESS DENTISTRY IS EXPENSIVE."

The easiest, most efficient method for achieving paperless dentistry is free! Read the rest of this article to see how.

2 "I NEED TO CHANGE PRACTICE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE."

If you are using any Windows or Mac management software, most likely you do not need to change. Changing management software, even to an excellent free program like Open Dental, is usually "expensive" in time and hassles. What is required of your current software is a "place" to attach your clinical notes. Virtually all Windows and Mac programs have this. Some older MS-DOS based software may not.

3 "I WILL NEED NEW COMPUTERS."

If your computers satisfactorily run your current software, you do not have to buy new ones. Paperless Dentistry does not put any additional demands on your computers.

4 "I WILL NEED TO LEARN TO TYPE."

Ninety percent of our charting consists of 3-5 keystrokes that "explode" into full sentences or paragraphs. This method uses a feature in MS-Word called "auto-correct" which allows highly customized, accurate and complete progress notes. With a couple more key stokes, these completed, legible, and correctly-spelled notes are pasted into your existing management software. "Hunt and peck" typing works just fine! If you don't already own a copy of MS-Word, you don't need to buy one. You can do the same thing with the free MS-Office clone called Open Office. More information and an example of auto-correct explosion charting is available on our website at http://www.paperlessdentistry.com/autocorrect.html

5 "IT'S ILLEGAL."

Quite the contrary, the government is encouraging computerized records. The California Dental Board says the only additional requirement for paperless records is an off-site backup. This is analogous to seat belt laws – you must be kind of crazy not to do it anyway! See item 8 below.

6 "I WILL HAVE TO SCAN IN ALL MY OLD PATIENT RECORDS."

We think this is an expensive mistake. It is too much work for too little return. We recommend that you slowly phase out your paper charts. You start by putting all your clinical notes in your computer from today forward. You still pull your paper charts when patients come in so you can look up old information. If you are not yet using digital x-rays, you still use your paper charts to store your conventional x-rays. Slowly your need for your old paper charts disappears. Eventually you move them to the basement and ultimately you can shred them. *Paperless Dentistry is a process, not an event.* This method is less work and free!

7 "MY STAFF WILL HATE IT."

Once you start actually doing it, your staff will love it. You need to reassure them that they will not have to learn to type because they will be using auto-correct. Their jobs will not only be easier but they will be able to read your progress notes!

8 "I COULD LOSE ALL MY RECORDS IF MY STAFF DOESN'T BACKUP! AND BACKUP IS SO EXPENSIVE!"

The time has long-passed when people should backup data. This task is too important to be jeopardized by human error. It needs to be entirely automatic. Our data is backed up from the server every 10 minutes. Each evening it is also backed up to several other computers in our office and to a free Internet-based service, CrashPlan. This happens every night, unattended and automatically, using another free program, Karen's Replicator. These two programs also automatically "restore" the data onto the doctor's home computer. If the office burns to the ground, the data is safe "in the cloud" *and* on the doctor's home computer.

The home computer can become a temporary "server" in a new office location with no loss of time or data. And, of course, it's all automatic and free! (Patient data should be stored *only* on encrypted media – including the doctor's home computer hard drive.)

9 "IT WILL TAKE TOO LONG TO CHART."

This method of paperless charting is incredibly fast … far faster than pen and paper. In our office, a chairside assistant completes all the charting in the one and a half minutes it takes for a double bite impression to set. By the time the patient leaves the operatory, all the charting is done, the lab slip is completed, the insurance is documented and sent with images and the next appointment is scheduled. On the patient's way out, the front desk person just has to put down her *People Magazine* long enough to collect money. Paperless Dentistry is much more efficient than paper-based systems!

10 "I WILL HAVE TO PUT COMPUTERS IN ALL MY OPERATORIES TO BE PAPERLESS."

You can do all the things we have talked about with only one computer. However, there is no question that you will eventually have computers in each operatory. But remember, this is a process, not an event. It is also not a race. You can smooth the transition by initially using one wirelessly connected notebook moved between ops. Properly installed, modern wireless networks can be secure and work very well.

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