Dental Cloud Communications: Effective Treatment for Group Practice Pain Points

By DOUG BONDERUD - Contributor

Healthcare consolidation is on the rise. As the American Dental Association notes, physicians are experiencing an aggressive shift to group practices thanks to their close association with hospitals — and the benefits of consolidation among dental practices suggest this trend will continue in dentistry, too. Specifically, organizations with 10-20 locations are becoming more common in an effort to both cut administrative costs and meet evolving patient expectations. But beyond shared goals and standard pricing, companies need technology capable of handling group practice pain points — and it starts with dental cloud communications.

Group Effort

What's driving the move to group dental practices? Many states are now experiencing an uptick in the number of available dental clinics. In addition, new dentists are looking to work with stable, well-established practices at the start of their careers. The result? It's a tough market for both individual and partner-owned practices.
Much like owning a franchise, however, dentists can trade on the power of name recognition and skill by creating a group practice that offers the same standard of care, services, and payment options across a wide geographic area. The challenge is ensuring that individual practices all have access to the same data and that dentists and support staff in each practice are equipped to easily access, utilize, and record critical patient data on demand.

**Tech Talk**

Dentistry depends on technology, from reliable X-ray machines to computer modeling and patient profile building. And the industry isn't standing still: According to Phys.org, advancements such as augmented reality are on track to offer previews of cosmetic dental work, while efforts continue to empower tooth regeneration rather than simply defend against decay. Right now, both low-level laser technologies and medications used to treat Alzheimer's disease have the potential to renew dentin cell growth. As dental practice models shift from single-office to group initiatives, however, it's critical for offices to employ cloud communications technology which streamlines the flow of information between locations: What type of treatments has a patient received? When? Which practices offer the cutting-edge technology that meets emerging patient expectations? Put simply? While emerging tech solutions are critical to corporate success, without dental cloud communications they lack reach and impact.

**Improving Customer Satisfaction**

Patients now have greater expectations of their dental practice, informed by both easy access to technology and greater competition among smaller providers. It's become increasingly important for practices to "wow" clients to keep them coming back. This would include more personalized attention from staff and taking genuine interest in correcting service oversights.

According to Dental Economics, practices can't underestimate the value of practice longevity: The longer an office has been open, the better its average reputation, drawing customers from farther away. The takeaway for group practices is that both brand recognition and outstanding customer service are critical to improving overall client satisfaction. This is a key advantage of dental enterprise cloud communications: Groups with 10, 15, or 20 offices can share a single website, offer consistent service and pricing, and easily update service details for all practices simultaneously. Cloud integration with on-premises customer relationship management (CRM), meanwhile, makes it easier to impress patients.

**Streamlining Reporting and Analytics**

Big data is also critical for group dental practices. As noted by Fortune, big data in healthcare has the potential to provide more targeted care — for dentists this means getting a better handle on patient histories and administrative records to drive tangible change. In the group practice setting specifically, dentists have access to a wide variety of client histories. When these are combined and analyzed using top-tier big data solutions, it's possible to both improve median treatment outcomes and better predict the ongoing needs of multiple clients.

Administratively, linking electronic health record data across multiple locations offers much-improved insurance and compliance record keeping. For example, patients providing insurance data at one location could consent to have this data stored across the entire group practice cloud, meaning they wouldn't have to redo paperwork if they book appointments at another office. From a compliance standpoint, meanwhile, secure cloud hosting helps fulfill basic Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act requirements and ensures that dental groups always have a clear, auditable trail of data creation, interaction, and modification.
Finally, cost savings and revenue are the driving force behind many group practice initiatives and can be further enhanced by leveraging dental cloud communications. First up is reduced labor waste. When administrative staff and dental assistants aren't spending their time filing, refiling, and finding patient records among veritable fortresses of filing cabinets, they can spend more time attending to patient needs and improving overall quality of care.

It's also possible to improve revenue under a cloud-based model. Group practices can more effectively market their combined services to a wide, web-based audience. Plus, upselling specific services is made much easier when front-line staff can pull up patient histories and determine relevant offerings in the moment. For example, admin staff with easy access to dentist notes from multiple offices could offer whitening services or cosmetic procedures in addition to regular check-ups.

Group dental practices can increase total client base and provide opportunities for better patient care, but come with unique pain points. Cloud solutions can help empower new tech solutions by facilitating data transfer, improving client satisfaction, driving better data analytics and boosting total revenues. Bottom line? Cloud communications are the root of effective digital transition for dental group practices.

*Learn more about how Vonage can help dental practices leverage cloud communications and other healthcare solutions.*