I would like to ask my hygiene colleagues out there, is there a published standard of care regarding the frequency of perio probings? Thanks. ■ Dr Keller

I’m not sure if there is anything that is published, but in my office we probe every year. On perio maintenance patients, we probe at every visit. I find that if we do this often, the patients know what numbers are good and becomes even more motivated to do better with home care. ■

In the offices I have worked we probed yearly, unless it was a perio maintenance (PM) patient, then we probed at every re-care appointment. ■

This is a subject that I really enjoy discussing! Personally I probe (and advise when I coach) that all patients are probed each and every time they are in my chair. With this protocol, the slightest changes in the periodontal condition show up. The patients are then getting trained to really “grade” themselves. It is vital that patients are aware of their health and begin to become a participant in their health. ■ Sarah

I probe every tooth at every visit. We do a PSR probing, and if they have any areas of change or 4mm then we re-appoint for a full periodontal probing with documentation. Seems to work well for us. ■ Alice

It is imperative for you to set the tone of the office. Be the leader and set expectations for your staff. Hire people who will carry out your vision of care. Your hygienist should have data collection completed by time you walk into the room and he/she should provide a brief clinical assessment. ■

You might want to give your hygienists the gift of more advanced education. You might also want to look into getting signed up with Previser, www.previser.com. This would be an excellent way for you to objectively get your team onboard.
for a higher level of care and it will also protect you legally. This really should be standard of care.

We probe at the start of the appointment. If you do it at the end, it's easy to say, "Oh, I didn't have time, we'll do it next time" or even more embarrassing if you're praising the patient on how well they're doing and then you find a 6mm pocket. Always do the assessment first, thereby using the appointment time to educate the patient, discuss issues, etc.

At my office, we probe at every appointment using Dentrix. Just last week, I probed a 12mm area on the buccal of tooth number 30 on a three-month PM. Probing depths and radiographs from the last visit showed nothing significant. I took a radiograph and an abscess was evident. No pain reported, but the tooth definitely needed attention. Wouldn't have known this if we only probed once a year.

Probing serves as a great educational tool for the patient. It opens up dialogue to find out why there might be changes, helps us look at more than just teeth (are they dealing with an aging parent, did their kid just flunk out of college, did they lose their job?) and hopefully we can help them be aware of the problem and offer solutions.

Having time and perhaps an assistant to record probing scores would be more than helpful. Many docs want an intraoral exam, extraoral exam, health history, blood pressure, oral cancer screening with ViziLite, probing, scale and polish, patient education, chart documentation, photos, X-rays, and making the re-care appointment, all in an hour or less. Add seating the patients, preparing the op, and instrument sterilization and our hour is completely full.

I think probing every appointment would be great. I am a conscientious hygienist, but I have to work within the time allowed.

The hard part about perio charting is finding someone to help enter the data. If you don't have an assistant to help, check out the Dental R.A.T. (www.dentalrat.com). It just plugs into the software you are using and allows you to enter the numbers, bleeding, recession using your foot. With all regular mouse functions, use it for digital X-rays and intra oral cameras! The software talks, so the patient hears the numbers.