



Annual Checkup

There is a certain rhythm to the months and seasons. Beyond the weather, celebrations and sports is the dental practice: Every six months or so, the same faces reappear, the daily procedures start to melt together and the office occasionally feels smaller. Inevitably, the year comes to an end so the cycle can start all over again. As the year comes to a close, I find the same annual rituals on my to-do list.

Each year, I create an office holiday card to send to my patient list. It costs roughly \$1 per household and I find it's well worth it to send an old-fashioned physical greeting. We send a custom-designed postcard that includes pictures of everyone on the team. The message on the back is a great opportunity to share with our patients some of the improvements we've made throughout the year, and we provide insights into any changes planned for the coming year. If you have any hesitation about a future goal for your practice, announce it to your patients and you *will* get it done. The final (and sometimes underappreciated) benefit of mailing this postcard is that the undeliverable cards that are returned in the mail—in our practice it is standard to verify addresses at the start of every visit; this serves as a proof of that policy.

Sharing plans with our patients is also an opportunity for me to prepare a second list to share with my team at our first monthly meeting of the year. Long ago, I learned that each new year would bring changes and we must be prepared to respond. We must also focus on our opportunities to be agents of change. It's easy

to get into a comfortable rut in your daily practice; in fact, many people crave consistency and fear change. When you're leading the change, there is less reason for fear, and the pursuit of improvement is often very energizing.

You might have a team member who needs some one-on-one training

to get better with a skill, or a piece of equipment that you know will need to be replaced very soon. Financial goals provide a yardstick for teams to monitor progress, but there's often a disconnect between the day-to-day activities around patient treatment and the sum of fees



collected. Look for other goals and milestones that your team can strive to reach, such as reorganizing parts of the office to improve efficiency, choosing new office colors, or finding a patient in the practice who would be a worthy recipient of some charitable care.

Closing the books is my shorthand for preparing documents for the accountant every year. I'm sure each practice does it a bit differently, but the end of the year means you're making sure every account is reconciled in QuickBooks, you've run final reports in your management software, and you're gathering documentation for any large purchases you made throughout the year. If you have a retirement plan, this may also be time to ask your TPA for profit-sharing calculations. It is certainly too late to make an important financial decision for the benefit of 2019, but you might identify an area that needs to be a focus for 2020.

Please visit this article online and share some of your year-end thoughts and goals for 2020. What will you do differently in the new decade? If you have a question or need a bit of advice, you can reach me via email: tom@dentaltown.com. ■



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