

Here are a few things they should know but may not be fully aware of:

- next to the doctor, the hygienist is often the most educated professional in the practice
- in all states except one, hygienists must go through, at a minimum, a two-year accredited program, study anatomy, physiology, chemistry, pharmacology and get an associate's degree
- hygienists must pass a full-day written national board exam on all systems of the body and pass a state and/or regional clinical board exam
- good oral health starts in hygiene; good overall health is connected to good oral health
- preventive appointments are not "just cleanings" – they include a complete evaluation of the health of gum, teeth and bone, oral cancer screening, early detection of decay, disease and other dental issues that enable the dentist to diagnose treatment
- good hygiene can set the foundation for successful clinical dentistry
- how frequently a patient needs to have a preventive appointment depends upon their oral health status

Once the team knows the role of hygiene, it's easier for them to see the value, so that everyone can change the external dialogue with patients.

The External Conversation

It's important that your patients hear a consistent value narrative from each member of the team when preventive

hygiene is discussed. The language your team uses should begin to make a perception shift in the minds of patients who also may not fully understand the value of the appointment. Of course, you don't want to make the dialogue too complicated or confusing, but you do want to clearly communicate value. For example, using the words "hygiene appointment" communicates cleaning, while "preventive appointment" or "oral wellness exam" communicates a much different type of care and benefit to the patient. These word choices should be consistently used by all members of your team and communicated to patients early and often.

One way you can help your team change the external conversation and begin consistently communicating the true value of the preventive appointment is by providing them with real-life examples and scripting. Compliments of CareCredit, I am making available *Preventive Appointment Communication Strategies + Scripts* that includes dialogues for:

- scheduling preventive appointments with new and existing patients
- verifying scheduled appointments
- managing cancellation requests



To order, call
800-859-9975,
option 1, then 6.

It takes a team effort and consistent communication, both internally and externally, at each patient appointment to help them understand the value of preventive care. When patients know that it's not "just a cleaning," fewer patients will be likely to delay or fail their appointments.



About the Author: Rachel Wall, RDH, BS, and CEO of Inspired Hygiene, serves the dental community as a hygiene consultant and speaker. Rachel coaches dental teams to build highly productive hygiene departments by creating and implementing systems for high quality periodontal care, enrolling restorative care through hygiene and managing the logistics of a high performance hygiene department.

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