Here’s what not to do — throw out your progress notes, X-ray film, and other systems you’ve used for years and go into work the next day with a completely new and paperless system that you and your staff have never seen. And you still must take care of your packed schedule. This kind of nightmare would make any dental team anxious and could be a recipe for disaster. Fortunately, offices that want to go paperless don’t have to do it all at once, but can take it one step at a time. Let me suggest three initial steps to going paperless: 1) create treatment plans from within your software, 2) go digital with your X-rays, and 3) use some type of digital document software.

Use your software to create treatment plans
Many offices still use paper to record patient treatment plans. They may think the computer is too slow, they may feel adverse to change, or they may see no real value to creating treatment plans on the computer. The truth is, with today’s practice management systems such as DentiMax, Dentrix, and Eaglesoft, treatment planning from the computer in the operatory is faster.

But beyond increasing your treatment plan recording speed, electronically captured information is easier to access and lends itself to a better office workflow. It really is a beautiful thing to watch the smooth flow of information between the back and front office as treatment plan, perio, clinical notes, and other data is shared to create claims, statements, and new appointments.

Go digital with X-rays
For a real productivity boost, combine your practice management software with a digital X-ray system. Using these two systems together lets you view digital X-rays while treatment planning — at the same time. The advantages of digital X-rays over traditional film are well documented.

With a digital X-ray system you save time by not waiting for film to develop, use less radiation on your patients, send your X-rays electronically for faster payment, use software tools to educate patients, and eliminate your film and chemical developing solutions.

If you haven’t already gone digital, now is a good time to shop. Like everything else electronic, prices have come down and the technology has gotten better. Companies such as DentiMax, DEXIS, Kodak, and Schick offer high-end digital sensors that take incredibly clear X-rays. You might want to check out their latest product offerings.

Adopt digital document software
If your front desk is cluttered and overrun with paper, it may be time to add document software. Digital document software helps your office organize, capture, and store patient insurance cards, driver’s licenses, signatures on your financial/privacy release forms, and printed documents. The beauty is that once your patients’ paperwork is entered into the computer, it’s always in the computer, making it easily accessible from any of your computer workstations.

Many practice management systems now offer this kind of software. You may even find out that you already own document software but just haven’t used it.

Throwing your paper and manual systems out the window one day and switching “cold turkey” the next to a completely paperless system is a bit too much for any office.

Fortunately, going paperless is not an all-or-nothing proposition. From using your software’s existing treatment plan to digital X-rays and digital documents, you can go paperless one step at a time, at your own pace. So what are you waiting for?

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