

3 KEY THINGS DENTISTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TELEDENTISTRY TO SURVIVE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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While teledentistry has been growing steadily over the last few years, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has thrust teledentistry into the spotlight as the “must have” technology to care for our patients while maintaining social distancing. Understandably, dentists are confused as to what teledentistry is, how to get going and how to use it to elevate their care and profitability.

The good news is that while having your dental office closed will never be the same as being open, teledentistry is a great way to massively increase efficiency, wow your patients, and bring in revenue if done correctly. So, with that goal let's dive into the basics of this rapidly developing technology.

What exactly is teledentistry?

Teledentistry is a rather broad term that encompasses several ways that **we can communicate remotely with our patients**. But as you'll learn, not every method of practicing teledentistry is the same. So, let's break down the term into the three subsets of teledentistry to make the overall term make more sense.

- 1. Asynchronous communication** refers to the style of communication that **does not require the parties to be communicating at the same time**. Think of texting or Facebook Messenger. Patients and dental teams can send text, video or images back and forth. This is, not surprisingly, the most commonly used form of teledentistry for offices, and most preferred by dentists... just like texting is the preferred mode of communication today for most people.

Secure, asynchronous communication allows us to have a written record that gets uploaded into our practice management system, such as Eaglesoft, for easy documentation. Typically, this form of teledentistry is used to either triage emergency calls, so you can get patients scheduled appropriately without having to take a phone call, or as a marketing opportunity to evaluate peoples' smiles prior to coming into the office.

Asynchronous teledentistry is an easy and effective tool in determining whether a case is a dental emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Benefits to asynchronous teledentistry include:

- Huge time savings.
- Ability to think, review and respond.
- Higher quality video and images.
- Ability to leverage your team to help triage cases.
- Ability to save video, images and text in your practice management system.
- No additional software downloads required by patient, keeping things simple.
- Embed on your website.

Limitations to asynchronous teledentistry:

- Slower response time between parties (not instant).

2. **Synchronous communication** is another popular form of teledentistry that requires both parties to be talking at the same time. This is similar to secure web-conferencing that works like Zoom or FaceTime.

Typically, synchronous communication works best when dental professionals are working together, like a web conference. For example, remote dentistry where a hygienist goes into a nursing home to provide care, the dentist and hygienist can work together to provide the best care possible over a live stream by actively working together on the case.

Dental offices should be careful when they look to incorporate synchronous communication, as it can easily become burdensome on the team, and most of us do not want to video chat with our patients when we are not in the office... And they may not want to video chat with us either.

Benefits to synchronous teledentistry:

- Instant back and forth communication with providers.

Limitations to synchronous teledentistry:

- More time consuming.
- Hard to coordinate and schedule.
- Doesn't remove the need for an office visit.

3. **Definitive care** is important to segment out as a separate category of teledentistry, even though it can be composed of either asynchronous and/or synchronous communication. The reason why this is a complete category on its own is that many times asynchronous or synchronous communication can be leveraged to market your practice, coordinate in care or in emergency triaging, but staying clear of providing definitive treatment.

Services like SmileDirectClub have popularized the definitive care usage of teledentistry, which has elicited the counter response by many state dental boards preventing this type

of teledentistry. So, unless you are planning on providing definitive care through your teledentistry services, it is important that you, your team and your patients know how you are using the technology.

Teledentistry is higher quality, more profitable dental care.

Once offices start using teledentistry, like several technologies in dentistry, it is hard to go back to the “old way.” When you can visualize patient issues prior to appointing them, most of us know more accurately how to schedule patients for final data collection and treatment planning. **This saves the patient and the office time.**

Possibly more important, teledentistry is a safe, easy way to reach out to the over 20% of American adults that have delayed dental care, due to anxiety. Many times, new patients are out there, feeling embarrassed and ashamed about their oral condition.

Guiding patients through simple photo and video collection that they pass along to you to review is a much more dignified process than calling or coming into the office when scared. In this way, we can reassure patients that we have seen many people in their condition and that they will not be shamed or lectured in our practices.

BONUS: Show patients how to take great intraoral photos [\[video\]](#).

What should I look for in a teledentistry platform?

When evaluating teledentistry platforms, make sure that it provides the desired workflow for you, your team and your patients. This is typically asynchronous communication.

While the HIPAA regulations have been eased a bit for teledentistry usage during the COVID-19 crisis, it is important to still leverage a HIPAA-compliant teledentistry platform that includes secure email and case collaboration to follow up with patients and referrals. Once you start using a teledentistry platform, it will be hard to switch, so make sure to start off right.

Complete and accurate documentation and writing dental chart notes is always a challenge in dentistry, and even more so when it comes to consultations outside the office. So, also make sure that your teledentistry platform makes it easy to write notes that are integrated with your practice management system and that you have easy access to your schedule, for when you must convert all those teledentistry consults into profit.

OperaDDS is a dental office communication platform with a teledentistry tool that allows dental offices to send and receive secure paperless forms, emails and digital cases to patients and colleagues effortlessly, while maintaining HIPAA compliance. [Explore all the features of OperaDDS including its teledentistry tool.](#)

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