

# Are You Missing Your Best Team Player?

What's the difference between a periodontal therapist and a conventional dental hygienist? Many hygienists assume that if they perform occasional scaling and root planing procedures, they are periodontal therapists—wrong. The financial contribution that periodontal therapists make to a dental practice's total revenue and profitability substantially outpaces conventional dental hygiene departments.

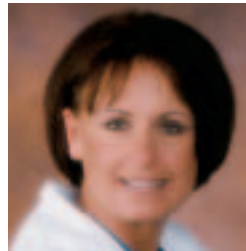
One of the best ways to determine whether a dental hygienist is practicing at the periodontal therapeutic level is to determine their average production per hour. The chart below demonstrates the relationship between the level of production in a general practice of a periodontal therapist and the level of production of a general dental hygienist.

A dental hygienist with an average production of less than \$150 an hour does not likely specialize in periodontal therapeutics. Generally, practices with these dental hygienists have most of their adult patient base on 6-month recare appointments, with few opportunities for comprehensive periodontal assessments and no clinical pathway for the treatment of chronic periodontitis.

## BIG FISCAL PICTURE

Many dental practices with average hygienist production fees of around \$200 an hour perform scaling and root planing procedures several times a week, yet lack a formalized clinical pathway to identify and treat chronic periodontitis. This handicaps their caseload and ability to achieve optimal clinical

end points. As shown in the chart, even periodontal therapists who are working in practices with fees as low as the 40th national percentile generate average hourly production fees of \$300.



Casey Hein is an independent periodontal therapist contractor in the Washington, DC/Baltimore area and founder of PointPerio, LLC, a consulting firm committed to coaching general dentists and hygienists in progressive periodontal therapeutics within a collaborative framework. She is a member of the American Dental Hygienists' Association. She lectures nationally on the role of the periodontal therapist in general practice, is the author of the monthly "Perio Pathways" column in *Contemporary Oral Hygiene*, and publishes her case studies. She welcomes visitors at her Web site, <http://pointperio.com>.

At the average hourly production fee of \$300, 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year, they produce close to \$600,000 per year. This is about \$100,000 more than the average dental practice and their dental hygiene department grosses yearly. Independent general practitioners had average gross billings of \$500,910, including hygienist-generated fees, per owner in 2000.

At 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year, the production capability of a conventional dental hygienist is only \$135,000 per year. The disparity in these numbers represents the different levels of expertise in diagnostics, prognostics, treatment planning, case presentation, and technical capability that distinguish a periodontal therapist from a dental hygienist.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

Dental hygienist production statistics are not surveyed by either the American Dental Hygienists' Association or the American Dental Association. Because compensation is determined by production, it is important to survey the production trends of hygienists. Data we have on average daily hygienist production from consulting firms report it to be an

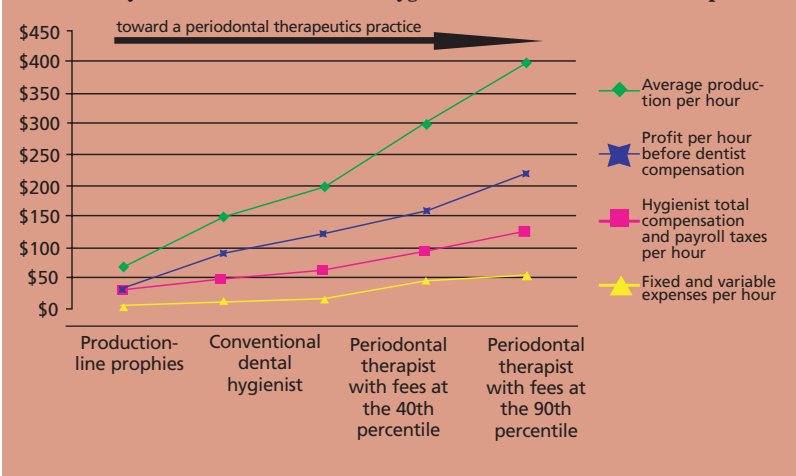
average of less than \$600.

In contrast, periodontal therapists are producing daily production averages in the range of \$2000 to \$3500 (the final figure depends on discounted care, national percentile of fees, and geographic location). This higher level of production results in a higher compensation for periodontal therapists.

When a dental practice employs a periodontal therapist, the practice stands to significantly benefit from the enhanced revenue stream associated with comprehensive periodontal therapeutics. Even with increased compensation levels for a periodontal therapist and other expenses involved with practicing evidence-based periodontal therapeutics, dentists are starting to realize dramatic increases in practice profitability.

Dental hygienists practicing at the periodontal therapeutic level understand the significance of long-term patient treatment and readily take responsibility for therapeutic outcomes. This is what makes them so valuable to dentists and places them at the forefront of the reformation in professional roles. ●

Comparison of Production Capability, Compensation Potential, and Practice Profitability of Conventional Dental Hygienists and Periodontal Therapists



# Make Your Laboratory a Marketing Mentor

The basis for marketing is to inform people in the marketplace of what is available to satisfy a real, perceived, or created need for something and convince them that the seller's goods are better than the competition. For example, a dentist could convince a prospective patient that they want to have their porcelain-fused-to-metal restorations replaced with metal-free alternatives, thus satisfying their need for a natural-looking smile.

To be successful in the marketing arena, dentists must convince patients of 2 things: first, that such treatments are needed; second, that theirs is the best dental practice to satisfy those needs.

## LABORATORY FOCUS

Chances are that 1 of your first professional contacts was your laboratory. That said, your laboratory successfully marketed itself to you. Now might be a good time to learn what your laboratory can share with

you about marketing your own practice.

Laboratories that have been in business for years and offer customers state-of-the-art products and services most likely can do so because they've been successful in strategically growing their business to better serve the industry. It stands to reason that your laboratory may have an abundance of ideas and recommendations in the marketing arena. Your laboratory, if successful in marketing itself to you, can be a strategic partner in the development of your own marketing plans and actions.

Identifying where to start is the hardest part of any endeavor, but a well-established laboratory can help you develop a plan of action that takes your goals into account. In the process, the laboratory, as a mentor, will help you identify your strengths, weaknesses, and points that separate you from the other dental practices out there.

A laboratory can assist you in determin-

ing your resources, marketing objectives, and position in the marketplace. It can also be a good resource to turn to when developing your marketing and growth budget. As a general rule, most companies allocate anywhere from 6% to 10% of their overall sales for marketing.

Take advantage of the array of contacts your laboratory has, including writers, designers, printers, mailing list companies, and advertising media. Establishing a connection with your laboratory—provided it has the networking and know-how to market itself—is an excellent step, saving you the time and trouble of doing all the initial research yourself.

## TACTICAL TACKLING

With your plan, budget, and contacts in place, a marketing-savvy laboratory can then provide you with guidance and advice in selecting what marketing tactics to use to get your message across. When

trying to visualize tactics, consider what your laboratory initially did to capture your attention. Did they send you a direct mailer or a personalized letter, or did you notice an advertisement in a magazine?

The point is that successful laboratories skilled in getting their message across can provide wonderful counsel when it comes to picking the marketing tactics that will work best for you. After all, in order to build its business, a successful laboratory must communicate with and market to a variety of potential customers. A laboratory has a host of media outlets, and while they all can get the message across, the message itself is only as good as the medium that is used to deliver it. A well-established laboratory can assist you in evaluating the best medium to reach a specific customer base. ●

Dan DeZak is director of marketing for BonaDent Dental Laboratories, located in Seneca Falls, NY.