By Heather Colicchio and Teresa Duncan, MS, FAADOM

The membership of the American Association of Dental Office Managers (AADOM) is composed of individuals who have first-hand experience dealing with situations that would make many people cringe. Some of the most common questions that emerge on our AADOM member forum deal with the rise of text messaging and personal calls in the office. We love text messaging and phone calls in our homes! But not so much among our staff.

We asked several of our AADOM members to answer this hot potato question.

Do how you handle your team when excessive texting and phone calls are an issue? Is there an example you’d like to share?

Melanie Duncan: To text, or not to text that is the question! I love technology, but sometimes it can be a detriment to your team. Believe me I have seen it all! There is the hygienist who is texting while a patient watches a CAESY video or the team members have free to keep their phones on them in case of an emergency. Really? Are they trying to say that the front office team cannot handle passing on a message? The answers are simple.

1) Make sure there is a policy in your employee manual that is clear and to the point.

2) Have the employee sign an agreement to leave his or her phone in the break room.

3) Expect 100 percent compliance! And when the policy isn’t being followed immediately with no exceptions allowed. There will be a list of excuses, but as long as you are consistent with your policies, technology will once again be your friend.

Lisa Spradley: Our office allows cell phones and texting as long as it does not interfere with our patient flow. However, when cell phones were first brought into the practice there were problems with rampant usage. We would have employees coming into the office with the cellphone to their ear and clocking in, and they would stay on the phone until they were ready to seat the patient. This was unacceptable.

After a discussion with the doctor, we decided that while we did not want to completely ban cell phones, we did need some basic guidelines. When employees come into the office and click in, they should not be on their phones. Also, while texting in between patients is OK — it must not delay patients being seated or rooms being cleaned.

No one is allowed to be on their cell phone or texting if they have a patient in the room. These guidelines helped to keep our patients as the No. 1 focus in our practice.

Deanna Alexander: Simply put, it is stated in our office manual. No cell phones are allowed in our work area. Each staff member has his or her own personal cubby space in the staff lounge area, this is where the cell phones belong. Everyone respects this policy.

Lisa M. Spradley: The ADA and AGD both have a “first step,” ADA representatives said. Given these findings, the profession of dentistry should support adding dental therapists to the oral health care team.

In December 2010 the Pew Center on the States released a report that was favorable to access-to-care challenges because of reduced financial payments. The work described as the most comprehensive economic analysis to date. The Academy of General Dentistry issued a statement that “applauds” the ADA’s stance in moving the focus away from workforce models and instead to focus on the more important goal — knocking down the barriers to access to care. ADA’s position detailed economic analysis was a new way of analyzing the viability of various midlevel provider models as a possible solution to access-to-care challenges for uninsured populations. The work described as the most comprehensive economic analysis to date.

The report’s principal author, Dr. Daniel Nabh, MD, MD, Ed, who is the William R. Wilard professor of dental education and a professor of pediatric dentistry at the College of Dentistry at the University of Kentucky, said, “None of the 1,100 documents reviewed found any evidence of compromising to children’s safety or quality of care. Given these findings, the profession of dentistry should support adding dental therapists to the oral health care team.”

In December 2010 the Pew Center on the States released a report that was favorable to the concept of using dental therapists to improve access to dental care, especially for Medicaid patients. The ADA and AGD both questioned a number of underlying assumptions and data on dental practice operations and demand for services and other aspects of the research methodology in both organizations’ reports.


How do managers deal with cell phone usage in the office?

Melanie Duncan, FAADOM: Photo/Provided by AADOM

Deanna Alexander, FAADOM: Photo/Provided by www.dreamstime.com

The ADA and AGD agree that gathering more information is a first step in assessing the viability of midlevel dental professionals.
Tina Brown: Excessive phone calls and texting can get caught up as well but gentle reminders in the very beginning of the occurrence with any team member usually helps.

Upon the second time I remind them again and let them know they are disrupting the flow of the day. I also ask if there is anything I can help them with so they can stay on task and suggest they save their calls and texts for their lunch hour or break.

If a third occurrence dares to happen they relinquish their phone for the rest of the day. It’s sad that sometimes it comes to that but I didn’t come up with the idea, they did!

When it became apparent there was an issue, I rallied the troops together and asked them to come up with a fair and reasonable penance.

They decided to give up their phones in lieu of documentation going into their employee file.

Julie McKee: Team morale is my top priority when implementing new policies and procedures. I do not enforce a policy that I have not researched and thought long and hard about. That being said, I have addressed this policy in a group/open-forum type setting so that I could share the reasoning behind the policy, and give them time to share how they feel as well. I maintain an open-door policy all the time and I want to know if and why they do not support a decision. This way I may be able to help them to understand the reasoning instead of having a ‘just do it’ attitude. That’s no fun.

Our policy — in a condensed version — states that any type of mobile device is not to be on your person in the clinical and business area. You may have your mobile in the break area or in your locker. The ringer must be set to vibrate if not turned off. All personal phone calls are not to be made during work hours, only on breaks and lunchtimes, unless of course it is an emergency. The staff is responsible for creating awareness of this policy to friends and family members.

I make sure the team knows that they are respected and this in no way implies giving my time and care the attention and respect I deserve, how do I trust her? How do I trust her to share resources and ideas to keep the practice on the leading edge of patient satisfaction. She is dedicated to making dental care accessible and affordable for everyone. Contact her at melanieduncan@rudentalconsulting.com.

LISA M. SPADACELLY has been in the dental field for more than 15 years. She is an office manager for a general dentist and has her own dental consulting business, TCB Dental Consulting. She helps train front-office staff in effective time management techniques. She is an active, lifetime member with AADOM and plans to receive her Fellowship this fall. She can be reached at lisa@cbcdentalconsulting.com.

DEANNA ALEXANDER, FAADOM, has been in dentistry for more than 30 years. She attends many continuing education courses to keep up with the fast pace of the ever-changing dental world. She loves the everyday variety of her responsibilities and being in touch with the patients.

TINA BROWN, FAADOM, has more than 30 years of experience in the dental field and is the president of Applied Dental Practice Enhancements—a training, consulting and speaking firm. She attended San Diego State University and Pacific College of Dental Assistants in San Diego. She is a retired RDA and has spent the last 20 years as an administrator. She is a lifetime member of AADOM and writes articles for the administrative team.

JULIE MCKEE, dental director at Gordon Dental, considers the practice and its patients a huge part of her family. She thrives on the camaraderie and pride of working in a state-of-the-art dental practice. She uses the AADOM network to share resources and ideas to keep the practice on the leading edge of patient satisfaction. She considers herself a lifelong learner and encourages those around her to be in a constant state of study, growth and action.

HEATHER COUCHIO is the president and founder of the American Association of Dental Office Managers.

TERESA DUNCAN is its educational content advisor. For more information please visit www.dentalmanagers.com.