

To charge or not to charge?

The new oral cancer screening dilemma

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ORAL CANCER HAS BEEN ON THE RISE for the past several decades. Five years ago, the dilemma that most dental offices faced was the decision they had to make regarding whether to use advanced technology to screen for oral cancer. The questions repeating in the minds of many clinicians were: To screen or not to screen? Do we need to bring adjunctive technology into our offices, or do we just use our eyes to look for this disease?

Fast-forwarding to the current state of dentistry, a lot has changed. The occurrence of oral cancer has continued to rise and has begun affecting a younger demographic, due to a staggering increase in the prevalence of human papillomavirus (HPV). Fluorescent technology for early discovery of this growing epidemic has continued to evolve. Adjunctive devices that incorporate this proven technology have been simplified and made to be cost-efficient. With devices like OralID that allow clinicians to use the latest technology with no cost per patient, oral cancer screening has become a no-brainer.

As a result, the new dilemma regarding oral cancer screening involves different questions: To charge or not to charge? Do we charge our patients for our enhanced oral cancer screening, do we only bill insurance, or do we screen for free as a service to our patients?

The great news is: With the latest device having zero cost per patient use, you can incorporate the technology with whichever answer to the question fits your practice best. Below, I will outline a few examples on ways to incorporate enhanced oral cancer screening into your practice.

TO CHARGE

Charging for services performed is standard in health care. As you invest in your practice, in terms of both time and money, it is natural to assume compensation will allow you to make a return on your investments. Enhanced oral cancer screening is a service you provide, and it is perfectly acceptable to expect an increase in revenue in return for the service.

How to charge for enhanced oral cancer screening can vary from office to office. Here are a few options for charging:

Charge an annual fee: You can simply charge a flat fee for your enhanced oral cancer screening. Set a fee of around \$20 (or within a range of \$10 to \$35) per patient, per year. If you educate your patients properly, you should see fairly high acceptance rates in your office. But if you just hand a patient a consent form and ask for a \$65 fee, you will not have any success. So, if you decide to incorporate this method, make sure that the fee is reasonable and that you have educated your patients about the importance of what you are doing. Explain that you have invested in the technology because it could potentially save their lives. OralID offers Lifetime Team Training by our in-house hygienist, so you can get help with ideas on how to best educate your patients and maximize screening acceptance.

Charge one fee for life: In the spirit of the “whitening for life” campaigns that some offices offer, you can charge up-front for participation in an “oral cancer screening for life” program. Charge \$35 to \$100 at the first visit and then screen the patient at no additional charge during future visits (as long as he or she does not miss any hygiene appointments, of course).

Raise your fees: Increase your exam and/or prophylaxis fees to include the service and do not charge the patient directly for it. This allows you the freedom to screen every patient and compensates you for your time and for your investment.

NOT TO CHARGE

Dental practices are always looking for ways to differentiate themselves from competitors. Offering advanced oral cancer screenings is a proven method for increasing marketability and gaining new patients. Performing free oral cancer screenings for every patient is a service that will be appreciated by patients and that will not only get you more loyalty from current patients but also motivate them to refer friends and family—and this is the ultimate marketing goal.

You can hand a card to each patient that reads, “Has your loved one been screened for oral cancer?” or a coupon for a free oral cancer screening. Doing so will certainly differentiate your practice from the others, building value in the practice by maintaining and growing the patient base. The days of “whitening for life” are unfortunately over, but offices can now incorporate “oral cancer screening for life” for their patients due to the latest technology finally being affordable enough to make it possible.

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A CHANGE IN THINKING

Patient care should be the focus for all offices. Given that, you may eventually change the method you choose in regard to charging or not charging. It’s not uncommon for offices to begin screening by charging for the service, only to decide not to charge after finding a lesion that might not have been discovered without the device. For many practices, a situation like this

one is a practice changer that leads to the realization that enhanced oral cancer screening is important for every patient.

So, when you are thinking about the new screening decision, whether “to charge or not to charge,” remember that there is no right or wrong. By making the simple choice to incorporate this technology into your practice, you could be making a life-changing decision for your patients. **DE**



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How Do You Screen For Oral Cancer?



- Differentiate Your Practice
- Increase Referrals & Patient Satisfaction
- Raise the Standard of Care

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