

Practice Points

Fee or Free

Mary just graduated from dental assisting school and has been hired by Dr. Smith, who has a busy orthodontic practice. Mary is excited about the orthodontic knowledge she has learned in just the two months she has been employed by Dr. Smith and has asked Dr. Smith if there is something that can be done about her anterior crowding.

Sally has been Dr. Smith's receptionist for 15 years. She has been loyal, honest, hard working and recommends that all her family and friends see Dr. Smith for their entire dental needs. Sally's 12-year-old daughter needs ortho and Sally would like Dr. Smith to do the treatment.

Bob has a construction company. He built Dr. Smith's dental office 10 years ago and has since become a patient and friend. On occasion, Dr. Smith and Bob get out to play a few rounds of golf together. Their families attend the same church and their children the same school. Bob's youngest son needs ortho and Dr. Smith needs a new roof on his house.

Lisa is Dr. Smith's dental hygienist of 7 years. She has recently been married and has encouraged her new husband to correct his deep overbite problem. Lisa's husband has dental coverage that will pay 50% of his orthodontic treatment. Although Dr. Smith has offered to treat Lisa's husband at no charge for all her years of loyalty, Lisa has suggested that Dr. Smith take advantage of the insurance coverage and "write-off" the difference.

It is not unlikely that the orthodontic dentist will be approached—or will approach—family, friends and staff regarding the need for orthodontic treatment. Before you dive in and slap those braces on in between patients or when that 2-hour bridge prep cancelled, there are a few things to consider that will keep you out of an uncomfortable or unfortunate situation.

Do you have all the necessary diagnostic records? Of all the scenarios above, none of the patients should be exempt from a complete set of records. Records are necessary for a proper diagnosis, medico-legally and may be required as a reference throughout treatment. Complete records include: intra-oral photos, extra-oral photos, study models, panorex, cephalometric and cephalometric analysis, transcranials or tomograms of the TM Joints, clinical exam, medical and dental histories, periodontal assessment, TMD history, questionnaire and exam.

Have you studied the records, developed a treatment plan, and presented the case? All patients, whether they are friends, family or staff, paying or not paying, want to know

the options, sequence and length of treatment.

Compliance may be a concern if the treatment is not understood. Plus, educated patients will promote you to others.

Do you have informed consent? You probably do not want to consider the risk of a medico-legal issue arising from someone you know and trust, however, never downplay this risk! Be sure to review all the risks and benefits of treatment or no treatment with all your patients, including scenarios as described above. Be sure the patient understands their responsibilities such as appliance care, oral hygiene and keeping scheduled appointments. Unless you are the legal guardian of the patient, be sure to get the informed consent document signed.

What will the financial arrangement be? Unless you are providing treatment for your immediate family, a signed financial agreement is a must. You may choose to provide the service for a discounted fee (as in Mary's case), no fee (as in Sally's case), a barter system fee (as in Bob's case) or a special arrangement with insurance (as in Lisa's case). Keep in mind that "writing off" what the insurance does not cover is not well accepted by some dental associations and licensing bodies.

Treating your staff is undoubtedly one of the best marketing tools you have, but you do have to draw the "discount line" at some time. Have a policy in place that is fair to you and understood by your staff.

Orthodontic treatment is a lengthy procedure that requires a lot of chair time and in some cases years of treatment. Situations change, staff move on or away and your employee list may grow. Offering a discount or trading services to friends and others should be well documented. Regardless of the arrangement, get it in writing!!!



June Williamson, RDH

June Williamson, RDH, is the founder of Orthorama Seminars, where she educates more than 1,000 auxiliaries per year. She works with Dr. Brock Rondeau and can be reached at info@orthoramaseminars.com.