Homecare Products are often overlooked - yet contribute significantly to one more profit center in your dental practice. You will exceed patient expectations when you consider their total health plus save them time and money with their everyday shopping needs. Our world today is extremely fast-paced, and offering home care products will become a benefit to your patients that goes a long way!

Selling Homecare Products: Creating Value and Convenience for Your Patients

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People want to improve their smiles, and the market for related products is growing exponentially. Every day, television commercials rave about oral hygiene products and cleaner, whiter teeth. Even advertisements not specifically for oral care show people with beautiful, white teeth – and viewers want what they hear and see daily. That’s good news for your dental practice, but are you doing all you can to capitalize on this opportunity?

You may have experienced frustration when patients return months after a visit, never having purchased the home care product you recommended. Patients leave the dental practice with the good intention of purchasing what you recommend, but let’s face it – life gets in the way, and many of your patients just never get around to buying the recommended products.

All that said, an often overlooked – yet significant – profit center in a dental practice is selling home care products. These products can contribute at least $30,000 to your practice’s net profits annually, and selling them requires only a small up-front investment. Even better, a quick return on investment is easily accomplished when everyone on the dental team participates and understands the value of offering these products. The point here is not to pressure a sale but to promote optimal oral health and create a simple solution for your patients.

Products You Should Make Available to Patients

**Bleach-kits** – Maybe you don’t think of these as “home-care products” in the true sense of preventive or therapeutic use but they are a “home-service product.” At-home, professional bleaching products provide a way for patients to gradually lighten their teeth, resulting in a more positive self-image. A whiter smile can make people feel better emotionally and psychologically.

Most of these professional home-bleaching kits are designed to be used overnight in custom trays. The 7.5-9.5 percent hydrogen-peroxide kits are designed for shorter daytime applications. I tell patients to wear their trays to touch-up while in the shower. It makes it very easy for them to remember and follow-thru with touch-up sessions at home.

At home bleach kits is a significant part of the profit from in-office product sales. They can make a substantial contribution to the practice’s bottom line. In addition, this will have on a positive effect on the practice. This will contribute to the emotional well-being for many of your patients.

**Fluoride Therapy** – The dental professional must first determine if a patient requires neutral sodium fluoride (NSF) or acidulated phosphate fluoride. (APF) NSF is used for caries reduction, remineralization, and relief of sensitivity. APF is utilized for caries reduction, enhanced remineralization, and reduction of hypersensitivity.

The dentist and owner of the practice must decide which of these products he/she would like to carry for their patients. Do you want to have all or some of these fluoride products choices available for your patients?

Take into account that approximately 70% of patients who leave the office with a prescription or note of what they need to purchase for their home care, never get purchased. Having these products available for purchase in your office is convenient and makes self-efficacy more effective.
**Anti-halitosis Therapy**—Research says the primary cause of malodor in 90 percent or more of halitosis cases originates in the mouth. Anaerobic bacteria live in the cracks and crevices of the tongue dorsum. These bacteria metabolize into the exfoliated tissue cells. The digestion of dead cells by these microbes produces by-products such as hydrogen sulfide and methyl mercaptan, the volatile sulfur compounds (VSCs). It is generally accepted that the odor of these noxious gases is a major factor in varying degrees of halitosis.

After thorough research conducted by the Clinical Research Associates (CRA) in Provo, Utah, it has been concluded that the best anti-halitosis products are Tooth&Gum Tonic (Dental Herb Company), a product developed for periodontal purposes, and Oxygene. (Oxyfresh Worldwide) These are the two products which created the longest, lasting results for malodor.

**Tongue Cleaners**—Mechanical cleaning of the tongue is an integral part of all halitosis (or periodontal) programs. There are numerous "tongue scrapers" on the market but the one we found to be most effective is called Oolitt Elite. (Oolitt Advantage Inc.) –

This tongue cleaner has a variety of different instruments to suit different mouth types including, the Oolitt Jr. for children.

**Periodontal-health Products**—Products for periodontal home care can be divided into two main categories:

- Medicaments (consumables)
- Mechanical devices (delivery systems)

**Medicaments**

(1) **Mouth rinses**
Large pharmaceutical companies that manufacture such products as Listerine, Scope, Act, Plax, etc., have flooded the consumer market with media campaigns. If the dentist wants to go beyond handing out free samples of commercially available mouthwash to recall patients, a number of options are available for in-office sales.

(2) **Subgingival irrigating solutions**
   a) Solutions for hand-held syringes and pocket irrigators - Any antimicrobial mouthrinse recommended to patients also should be used as a subgingival irrigant in a nonelectrical, hand-held applicator. This also holds true for use with interdental brushes and applicators.

   b) Solutions for Mechanical Irrigators - Mechanical devices such as the Viajet or WaterPik require a different concentration of product then do their hand-held counterparts. It is not cost-effective to use undiluted mouthwash in a mechanical irrigator. Diluting the mouthwash too much can reduce its effectiveness. Chlorhexidine can be used in a mechanical irrigator, but it is quite costly. It is more economical in a hand-held syringe can be used straight up, but it also can be used in a concentrate that can be diluted for irrigator use.
(3) Toothpastes (antimicrobial or anti-halitosis) - Most of the manufacturers of periodontal rinses, irrigants, and anti-halitosis products also make toothpastes. Make dentifrices available to your patients. You are the expert who knows which toothpaste is effective and best suited for the dental restorations and their health status.

**Mechanical devices**

(1) Manual toothbrushes - The major manufacturers such as Oral-B, Colgate, and John O. Butler do not want dental offices to sell manual toothbrushes to patients. It conflicts with their programs for product sales in retail outlets. Note that the toothbrushes you purchase for the office all have printed on the box "Not for retail sale" or something similar. No reason to push it. Build these types of toothbrushes into the cost of a recall appointment and don’t plan to pay down your equipment loan from the sale of manual toothbrushes in your practice!

(2) Power toothbrushes - There are a wide variety of different brushes on the market. Some of the more popular ones are sold in retail stores and are also available through dental practices. The various manufacturers make some very strong claims about their products (and the products of competitors!). The differences are in the size and shape of the brush head, handle design, and the type of functional movement the instrument makes.

**Hand-held irrigators**

Hand-held irrigators, when used, are very effective. They can be even more effective when the hygienist spends a few minutes instructing the patient on proper technique. Use of a hand-held irrigator to deliver antimicrobials subgingivally and produce optimal health benefits.

**Is Selling Products in a Dental Office “Unprofessional?”**

Do you still have an issue with "selling" products in the dental office? Do you believe that doing so is "unprofessional" or a "conflict of interest?"

If you answered “Yes” to this question please consider the following:

When patients are asked “What is one thing you would like to change about your smile?” The answer is usually “Whiter teeth!”

. Do you tell our patients to go buy a $60.00 home-bleaching kit on "special" at their retailer or to purchase a bleaching kit from one of the TV infomercials? Did you answer “No” to that question?

Most dental professionals are not sending their patients to a drug store or an infomercial to purchase their “over-the-counter” whitening products. Usually these trays or strips don’t fit properly. The gels are also inadequately formulated and either don’t work effectively or the gel can harm gingival tissue.
I believe that you will agree; it is in the patient’s best interest to purchase a home-bleaching kit from his or her own dentist. Using Forever White™ will mean that you can purchase at home patient bleaching for about 60% less money and that savings can be passed along to your patient.

Seldom does a dentist object to their office providing home-bleaching kits to patients at a price nine to ten times the cost of the kit itself. For most, this is a perfectly acceptable fee-for-service arrangement. If you are comfortable providing this service for cosmetic home care, how much more acceptable is it for us to provide our patients with the opportunity to purchase certain home-care products that are products certain to support optimal health and longevity of their teeth? With optimal health and keeping their teeth your patients can enjoy a better quality of life. They also reduce their risk for disease. I think this is something for them to be happy about!

Healthcare providers usually want to be sensitive to their patients’ needs and offering home-care products will provide a much-needed service that patients really appreciate. This will set the tone for excellence in your office. Patient’s now refer to their dentist as "cutting edge" when you provide services and products that are leading edge.

**Build Up Your Reputation as the Expert**

As you well know, patients get loads of oral care product information on the internet, from commercials, and even from makeover reality shows. Unfortunately, patients won’t even think to ask their dental providers about an oral care product they recently saw. As dental professionals, however, we must remind the public that we are THE experts on oral health and thus on the products that protect our patients’ smiles.

Find ways around your office to remind your patients know just how much you stay abreast of the research, the rapid changes in technology, and all the new products available for consumers. For example, you could include a section on your website that reviews products or simply informs patients about new products on the market. You can do the same with pamphlets or an office e-newsletter.

Bottom line, you want patients asking YOUR opinion so that if they see an ad on TV, internet of a magazine they like, they go to you for the expert opinion. Then, if your dental office has that product or a similar one available, you can sell it right then and there! Not only can you sell it but you can educate them about the best way to use the product. Once patients understand exactly how to use something new they are ten times more likely to begin using the product you recommend.

**Let Your Patient Education Do the Selling**

As a dental professional and/or hygienist, you may feel like you are running all day on a treadmill, and the last thing you want to do is add another task to your plate. Building a home care product niche, however, doesn’t have to involve a ton of extra work if you already educate your patients about home care products.
When patients learn from you what the most effective products are, their visit to the dental office will likely exceed their expectations. The icing on the cake (and the easy part) is actually having those products available for the patient to buy. This setup will create a WOW type of dental visit with little extra effort on your part. Tip: Be sure to set aside a few minutes during the patient appointment to demonstrate the proper use of the products. This is a perfect way to ensure the patient understands how to effectively use the recommended product.

*Added bonus:* These home care talks will improve your patients’ self-efficacy. You have taken time to help patients understand how to use a new product, and they will feel confident and at ease about buying it and then using it. Plus, having oral health care products available is just one more opportunity to add that personal touch – and patients may begin asking for refills when they return.

Everyone on your team needs to be able to talk to patients about the homecare products you offer. Don’t leave this conversation up to the hygienists and/or assistants. It is easy for all the team members to learn about all the products you offer patients to support optimal health at home.

During a team meeting take time to do an in-service training to get all the team members’ knowledgably about the products you offer and how patients need to effectively use these at home.

**Get Creative with the Holidays: A few suggestions**

**Summer specials:** Offer free or low cost whitening for graduates and brides

**Holiday Specials:** October, November and December are a great time to offer specials on power toothbrushes and whitening as well.

Valentines Day: Offer a sweet special for loved ones to give. What about offering a low cost smile makeover with teeth whitening at no additional charge?

**Check out Forever White™** which is a bleach gel (Carbamide or Hydrogen Peroxide) available to dentists and at wholesale. The same exact ingredients but in a larger syringe and customized with your office information for no additional charge.

Purchasing all the Forever White™ products means you keep most of the money while adding a great patient experience. Consider passing this savings along to your patients. Use this as a patient incentive if they do not cancel within 72 hours of their next dental visit. You may want to use this product as an incentive and offer free whitening to those patients who you have not seen in awhile.

**Do Your Homework First**

Although we highly suggest adding a homecare profit center to your dental business model, we also suggest taking an honest look at your practice and making sure you have the resources available to make it work. Here are a few questions to consider before diving into home care sales. Take time to share the questions with your team members, and listen to their suggestions on how this can work best for your business model.
What will your ROI be on the sale of these products?

- Discuss the cost of the products you will provide and how much to initially stock.
- Discuss the fees you will charge when you do carry these products.
- Find out if these products are covered by insurance.
- Note the billing code for patients who purchase these products.

Do you have a place to store these products?
- Find a time to clean your cabinets and purge expired and send-back products.
- Find out if you can send certain products back to the distributor.

How can you increase the odds of patients purchasing the products you recommend?
- Discuss how you can communicate the importance of optimal oral health.
- What words will you use to promote home care most effectively?

If patients buy these recommended products, will they understand how and when to use them?
- Have written home care instructions accompanying the new products.
- Have the home care and product use instructions on your website, as well.

Staying abreast of the new products and research to support dental product use is key. The last quarter of the year is a good time to schedule your annual strategic planning session. At this meeting, determine as a team what products you want to provide patients. Discuss the costs and benefits for you and your patients regarding the products you decide to make available for purchase in your dental office.

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