

# PPOS

## Leaving your PPOs



### BACKGROUND

Dentists sign up for preferred provider organizations (PPOs) because they believe that their patients care which insurance the office accepts and they hate to lose even 1 patient. PPOs know this and use the fact to compel dentists to sign up for more PPOs and to scare them from leaving those they've already signed up for. The facts about signing with PPOs and the ways to leave a PPO were explored to suggest the best course of action for dental practices.

### FACTORS LEADING TO NEW PATIENT NUMBERS

A survey of the properties of high and low new-patient-flow practices was done to identify what factors determine a successful practice. Practices with low new-patient flow tended to have little or no insurance participation, poor visibility, poor signage, old equipment and décor, an antiquated or nonexistent website, and untrained or unqualified staff members. Practices with high new-patient flow were shown to have good visibility and signage, PPO/insurance participation, active advertising, a strong web presence, up-to-date equipment and décor, an enthusiastic and well-trained staff, and expanded business hours. This analysis shows that PPO participation is just one of many factors that contribute to a high-functioning practice.

Signing up with every PPO available does not translate to a proportionate increase in new patients. The challenge appears to be how to balance PPO participation so that the discounted fees don't get out of control. The more plans a practice signs up with, the lower the fees tend to be. Dentists need to recognize that no insurance company works with all of the providers in a particular state. It's important to see that PPO write-offs are the dentist's biggest expense, right behind wages.

### LEAVING A PPO

#### Preparation

Every independent dentist must know how to manage PPO participation. That includes dealing with PPO decisions and transitions, which will give more control over the practice's bottom line. It's possible to leave a PPO if proper preparation is undertaken. Some patients will be lost, but probably fewer than are feared. Before beginning the process, it's important to set up specific credit adjustment codes for the various insurance companies with which the practice participates. Tracking this identifies how much PPOs cost the practice each month and can indicate the activity related to any particular plan.

### Objectives When Leaving a PPO

The objectives to be considered when leaving a PPO are to minimize the loss of patients, to slow down the loss of patients, and to tactfully handle things to maintain a comfortable existence for patients and staff members. The first step in transitioning away from a PPO is to evaluate practice statistics and ensure there is sufficient momentum that the practice will recover from the loss of any patients. This gives the practice something to work toward and helps the dentist pull things together. Some of the possible changes that can be made are updating the practice's web presence, reviewing systems and upgrading as indicated, and working on better offerings for the people already being seen. Hiring a qualified management consultant can help in evaluating how to make the right efforts at the right time.

### Considerations to Manage

Integrity, hard work, skill, and courage are all required to build a practice and create a successful business. The dentist must provide information to help the dental team members deal with their anxiety about leaving a PPO. During this time, it's important to discuss some important topics, such as the following:

- Do we believe that real fees are fair and that we deliver quality dentistry and service to the patients?
- How do we feel when some patients pay the full fee but those who have insurance pay 40% less?

If some of the insurance companies appear to compensate the practice better than others, these should be rewarded with participation and others can be let go. Staff members will need to be guided in how to tactfully address patients during the transition period. The team should be able to answer patients' insurance participation questions. This requires the dentist's participation in training them so that they understand the logic of what is being done.

### Clinical Significance

Participation in a PPO must be a carefully considered choice. Dentists should be slow to join PPOs, be methodical in leaving PPOs, avoid making decisions based on fear or anger, and remember that they have more power than they think where PPOs are concerned.

Rossi B: PPOs? Doctor, you have more power than you think. *Dent Econ* 108:22, 24, 26, 2018

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