

Information for Dentists — Delta Dental's New Employee Dental Plan

Communications Opportunities in Your Dental Practice

Delta employees have received information about their new dental plan, but even though they work for the plan administrator, they may not know the details or understand the impact on their care! Here are some simple strategies you can easily incorporate into your practice when treating Delta Dental employees.

The Cleaning

Everyone is eligible for at least one cleaning per year. During that initial cleaning, there is an opportunity for your dental hygienist to talk with the patient. Here are some potential talking points:

- Your dental plan previously paid for two cleanings each year and your employer has now reduced the benefit to a single cleaning per year based solely on issues related to gum health without regard to other benefits you may receive from your dental cleanings.
- To qualify for the second cleaning, which you have become accustomed to, you must have a medical condition which is considered to be a risk factor for periodontal disease, or test positive for a specific genetic marker.
- Based upon your current history, or the results of the genetic swab test, you may be eligible for up to three additional cleanings, for a maximum of four per year.
- For Delta employees who smoke: Smoking cigarettes is a major risk factor for periodontal disease, however your company chose to exclude smoking as a risk factor.
- There are other conditions which are normally considered risk factors, according to the American Academy of Periodontology, including age, medication, clenching/grinding, poor nutrition, stress, overall health, and obesity.
- It's always important for you to do what is best for you regardless of what your benefit plan covers, and I hope you will continue to work with us to develop the treatment plan that best meets your needs.

The Clinical Exam

It's important for patients to recognize the value of the clinical exam, especially since they may view the "cleaning" as the tangible benefit of a dental visit. Delta employees are eligible for two clinical exams, but it may be challenging to schedule that second visit if a cleaning is not also scheduled. Here are some ways you can communicate with these patients at the time of your exam:

- Clearly communicate the importance of the clinical exam, what you are looking for and the results of the exam.
- Patients know you are screening for oral cancer and caries, so it is important to show the value of the exam by explaining everything included in a comprehensive oral exam. Incorporate risk assessment tools and ADA clinical recommendations found on the ADA website into your exam and share the findings with your patient
- Ask the patient what questions or concerns he or she may have.
- Refer to the patient's most recent X-ray to illustrate diagnoses and any areas of concern.
- **Bottom Line:** Spend a little more time than usual with the patient to maintain the strong doctor-patient relationship, while demonstrating the value of the clinical exam.

Collaborative Treatment Decisions

It is always important that the dentist and patient come to a mutual decision about the treatment plan, and especially so when there are questions or concerns related to dental benefits coverage. Many Delta employees may have a higher dental insurance IQ than other patients; however, it is always important to remind patients that dental benefits should not be confused with dental services necessary to maintain optimal dental health. Here are some ways you can present that information to your patient:

- Dental benefits were never intended to pay for all of the care you may need. Regardless of your dental benefit, it's important for us to be able to work together to develop the best course of treatment for you. I hope you agree with continuing this approach for your care.
- My goal has always been to help you make good decisions when it comes to care for your teeth and your oral health.
- Over the years we have worked together to develop an appropriate plan for cleanings and treatment, based on your specific needs and resources.
- I take very seriously the confidence and trust you place in me and my entire dental team and would not want to see a benefit plan affect that.
- Here is what I recommend for you, based on the clinical exam, your personal health history, and my assessment of your risk factors.

Advocate for Your Patients

You know what's best for your patients and you are in a unique position to advocate on their behalf.

- If a patient's treatment needs are not covered by the benefit plan as a result of his or her assigned risk status, file an appeal with the plan. Clearly document and state the clinical reasons why such care is indicated.
- Be sure to let the patient know you are doing this on their behalf.
- Encourage the patient to support the appeal and advocate for their care with HR/benefits/union personnel.
- This action will open the door for discussion and build goodwill between you and the patient.

Include the Entire Dental Team

Be sure that all the members of the dental team, from the front desk staff to the hygienists and assistants, are sending the same message to Delta Dental employee patients.

- Develop a communications strategy with which you are comfortable.
- Share this document with your staff.
- Once you have developed a communications plan, conduct a trial run and role-play the discussion with a team member acting as a Delta employee patient.
- Utilize the MDA communications materials for Delta patients.

Anticipating Questions Your Patients May Ask

Some patients may have questions about the new plan. Keep your information factual and don't address questions that only the employer can answer. Here are some questions and possible answers.

- Why did Delta change the number of cleanings? *It's best not to speculate on the motivation for the change, but to say that you received the same information regarding the reason that the patient did.*
- Have any other benefits been reduced or eliminated? *Because the dentist does not always know the full picture, it's best to not speak for Delta, but to say something such as "To my knowledge, there have not been any other changes."*
- Should I take the DNA test? *That is entirely up to the patient. Some patients may have privacy concerns, and others may not be concerned in this regard.*