

BEYOND LOST PRODUCTION:

5 Hidden Costs of an Empty Hygiene Chair

THE REVENUE LOSS IS OBVIOUS. THE RIPPLE

EFFECT ISN'T. We all know there is a revenue cost when a hygiene chair sits empty. No hygienist means fewer patients being seen and less production.

That part is easy to calculate. But an empty hygiene chair doesn't always mean you have an open position. It can happen when one of your regular hygienists calls out sick, has a family emergency, takes an extended leave or is unexpectedly unavailable. Suddenly, you have a full schedule of patients and no one to see them.

The lost production is only the beginning. Patients must be moved, treatment can be delayed, the front office must rebuild the schedule, and the rest of the team feels the pressure. The true cost of an empty hygiene chair is the ripple effect it creates throughout the practice.

HIDDEN COST #1:

You're Moving Today's Problem Into the Future

Let's say eight patients were scheduled today, and your hygienist calls out sick. Those eight patients still need appointments. Unless you find someone to cover the day, those patients are moved into an already busy future schedule. One day may be manageable. But if a hygienist is out for a week, suddenly 30 or 40 patients may need to be rescheduled. An extended leave can create an even bigger backlog. The problem hasn't gone away. It has simply been moved into the future. What started as one uncovered day can create scheduling problems that last for weeks or months.

HIDDEN COST #2:

Patients May Start Looking Somewhere Else

Most patients understand when an appointment needs to be rescheduled once. But what happens when it happens again, or when the next available hygiene appointment is months away? At some point, your staffing problem becomes the patient's problem, and patients have choices. The real concern isn't just losing one hygiene appointment. It's potentially losing the patient. Think about the value of a loyal patient over five, ten or twenty years of hygiene visits, exams, X rays and restorative treatment. If their family also comes to the practice, the potential loss becomes even greater.



Losing one appointment hurts. Losing a patient or an entire family can cost the practice much more.

HIDDEN COST #3:

Diagnosis and Treatment Can Be Delayed

Hygiene is much more than a cleaning. It's one of the main ways patients regularly return to the practice, have an exam and identify treatment that may be needed.

When a hygiene appointment gets pushed out, everything connected to that visit can get pushed out too. Maybe it's a crown, periodontal treatment, an implant, a night guard or other restorative care.

Not every canceled hygiene appointment represents thousands of dollars in delayed treatment. But across dozens of patients, it adds up. More importantly, necessary patient care may be delayed simply because the patient couldn't get into the hygiene chair.

HIDDEN COST #4:

Your Front Office Has to Fix the Problem

When a hygienist isn't available, someone must deal with that full schedule. The front office must contact patients, explain what happened, find new appointment times and reorganize a schedule that may already be full.



Endorsed by
ADA Member AdvantageSM

Then those patients must be reminded and confirmed again. Some will be frustrated, and others may not be able to make the new times offered.

One uncovered day may mean rescheduling eight patients. A week could mean 30 or 40. That's a lot of employee time spent fixing schedules instead of answering new patient calls, following up on treatment, working on insurance and handling the other responsibilities that keep the practice running.

HIDDEN COST #5:

Your Team Feels It Too

An empty hygiene chair doesn't just affect the hygienist who isn't there. The entire team feels it.

Another hygienist may be asked to squeeze in a patient. The front office handles the rescheduling and frustrated patients. The dentist may try to accommodate more care, and the office manager may spend hours trying to find coverage.

Helping each other is part of being a team. But there's a difference between helping for a day and constantly trying to compensate for someone being out.

This is especially important with an extended leave. What a team can absorb for one day may be

very different from what it can absorb for several weeks. You don't want one team member's absence to put so much pressure on everyone else that you risk burning out or losing another great employee.

THE REAL COST

Is the Ripple Effect

We already know an empty hygiene chair costs the practice production. That's the easy number to calculate.

What's harder to calculate is the patient who had to wait three more months, the time the front office spent rebuilding the schedule, the treatment that was delayed, the extra pressure placed on the team or the longtime patient who eventually decided to call another practice.

Those things may not show up on today's production report, but they still cost the practice. Instead of only asking, "How much production did we lose because the chair was empty?" maybe we should also be asking, "What else did that empty chair cost us?"

Because the lost production is only part of the story. The real cost of an empty hygiene chair is everything that happens throughout the practice because that chair was empty.

Post a shift. Review candidates.
Book qualified professionals.
Keep your practice running smoothly.

Learn more and activate your ADA Member Advantage savings at ondiem.com/ada

Never Let a Staffing Gap Disrupt Patient Care

WHY PRACTICES CHOOSE ONDIEM

- No subscriptions, long-term contracts, or hidden fees. Pay only when you book a shift.
- All professionals are W-2 employees of onDiem, helping your practice stay compliant with labor and IRS requirements.
- Workers' compensation and unemployment coverage included.
- Trusted by more than 13,000 dental practices nationwide.

EXCLUSIVE ADA MEMBER ADVANTAGE SAVINGS

As an ADA member, you'll receive:

- A discounted flat 25% service fee on all shifts booked
- A \$25 rebate on each of your first 20 shifts, up to \$500 in savings