

## Dental Treatment for an Aging Population – by John Hom, DMD

Dental Health Services has noticed a significant enrollment of older members. This corresponds to the demographics of the general population as shown below. For older patients, extra consideration should be taken for conditions and circumstances that can affect treatments and outcomes.

Most seniors take many prescription and OTC drugs. For instance, it is typical for individuals in long-term care facilities to be taking more than 8 medications at once. Taking multiple medications increases your chance of having an oral side effect, usually xerostomia or dry mouth. Inhibition of salivary flow increases the



### Seniors in America

Nearly 40 million Americans are 65 or older.

Most people older than 65 have at least one chronic health condition.

More than 25% of 65 – 74 year olds have severe periodontal disease.

Over 50% of adults 65 and older are edentulous.

Oral/pharyngeal cancers are primarily diagnosed in the elderly.

risk for oral disease. The research has shown a positive link between periodontal disease, oral health and systemic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.

The initial examination and evaluation of our older members may take additional time for the review of their health history, medications, and status of their underlying medical conditions. Sometimes medical clearance and consultation with their physicians may be necessary prior to treatment.

Patient forms should be legible to those with vision impairments. Explanation of dental conditions, especially periodontal disease, are often easier with visual aids or handouts.

As with all members, a comprehensive, well documented treatment plan clearly noting the basic covered benefit and upgraded procedures, with a signed informed consent is essential.

Appointment times and appointment duration should be individualized to the member's limitations. Some do best in the morning or with shorter appointments. Members with physical handicaps may need special accommodations.

### Yelp, Google and Your Online Reputation

The most powerful influencer in consumer behavior after word-of-mouth lies in online reviews. The worst thing you can do is take the ostrich approach and bury your head in the sand. The best thing you can do is take action.

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Dental Health Services

## Yelp, Google and Your Online Reputation (continued)

A 2009 Opinion Research Survey found 84 percent of respondents said online customer evaluations influence their decision-making process when searching for services and products.

By contrast, only 28 percent have written and published reviews. Essentially, these 28 percent are influencing the great majority of purchasers, and potentially impacting who comes to your practice for dental care.

The problem with online reviews is that anyone can write them, and if you let them go unchecked, it can be a one-sided story about how awful you are.

What does this mean for you and your dental practice? You need to know what people are saying about you online, and you need to help contribute to and guide any conversations that happen online about your company.

For starters, take a look at Google.com, Angies-list.com, Judysbook.com, Citysearch.com and Yelp.com. Then, follow the directions to the right.

By knowing about your online reputation, doing your part to help build a positive image, and mitigating any negative reviews, you can limit the impact of a negative review, and even grow and bolster a positive image online.

And remember, it never hurts to ask a satisfied patient to write a positive review of your office.

### Take hold of your online reputation:

Know what people are saying about you. Google is the easiest way to know if there are negative reviews of your practice. Search for dentist names and practice names and see what you can find out.

Claim your profiles on major Web sites. Submit content to Google, Yelp, Angie's List, and Judy's Book to give prospective patients an idea of who you are and how you operate. Make sure all of your listings are current.

Respond whenever possible to every single review (not all sites allow responses). Write thank you notes to people who post positive reviews, and respond constructively to any negative reviews.



*Empty chairs  
in your  
dental office?*

*The reason could be  
negative online  
reviews.*

## Announcements & Call for Comments

### Language Assistance Program

Dental Health Services provides language assistance for our members who would like translation services.

During regular business hours, Mon-Fri 8am-5pm, you will be able to speak directly to us by calling 866.756.4259. After hours, you can still connect by following a few directions on the phone line.

We track dental offices that speak languages other than English as a service to our members. Please contact us to let us know what languages are spoken in your office.

We're always happy to hear any comments or suggestions you have regarding our service to you, and your service to your patients. Your Professional Service Specialist is available to answer all of your questions. In California call 800.223.4347, and in Washington call 800.400.0347.



Dental Health Services

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