

Quick Tips for the Dental Office



Maintaining & Retaining Patient Records

The Pennsylvania State Board of Dentistry has very specific regulations for preparing, maintaining and retaining patient records.

Record Maintenance

- ▶ Dentists must retain a dental record for patients reflecting their evaluation and treatment, regardless of whether treatment is actually rendered or whether fees are charged.
- ▶ Records must be **accurate, legible and comprehensive.**
- ▶ Records must, at a minimum, contain the following:
 - Name and address (and the name of a minor's parent or legal guardian).
 - Date of visit.
 - Description of the patient's complaint, symptoms and diagnosis.
 - Description of the treatment or service rendered at each visit and the identity of the person administering it.
 - Information related to prescribing, administering and dispensing of controlled substances and other medication.
 - Date and type of radiographs taken and orthodontic models made, as well as the radiographs themselves. Dentists must maintain written consent from a patient to release orthodontic models.
 - Information related to the administration of local anesthesia, nitrous oxide/oxygen analgesia, conscious sedation, deep sedation and general anesthesia, including the results of pre-anesthesia physical evaluations, medical history and anesthesia procedures utilized.
 - Date of each entry into the record and the identity of the person entering information into the record.

- Patient records must be retained for a minimum of five years from the date of the last entry.
- There may be additional records for patient records prepared by a dentist or an agent and retained by a health care facility regulated by the Departments of Health or Human Services. Consult with these departments to ascertain if there are any additional record-keeping requirements.



Transferring Records

- Upon a patient's written request, dentists must furnish an exact copy of the patient's written record, along with copies of radiographs and orthodontic models (if requested), to the patient or his/her new dentist. The patient should specify to whom the copies should be sent.
- Dentists have 30 days in which to honor a patient's written request.
- Dentists may provide copies gratuitously or for a fee reflecting the cost of reproduction.
- Dentists are obligated to transfer records regardless of a patient's unpaid balance for dental services or for the cost of reproducing the record.

Tips for Ensuring Compliance with Regulations

- Have an "exit strategy" for how records are to be handled in the event of your withdrawal from practice, incapacity or death, so that patients are able to access their records in a timely fashion.
- When retiring or leaving a practice, be sure to send notice to your patients in advance and provide information on how they may request their records before you retire or transition to another practice. Make sure you leave sufficient time to notify patients, and consider notifying them more than once. Also make sure there is sufficient time for you and your staff to copy records before you close or move.
- Make sure patients know who to contact after you retire or move. Consider asking another individual or practice to house the remainder of your records until they can be properly disposed.
- Make sure you have a plan in place for the disposition of records in event of unexpected death. Leave clear instructions for those who will be handling your practice.