



Navigating the “Great Resignation” in Dentistry

 planet
DDS

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Introduction

Today's dental practices face new staffing challenges and opportunities. Although a labor shortage existed in dentistry before the pandemic, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified it.

In March 2020, practices closed as the American Dental Association recommended dental practices postpone all non-emergency dental care citing the risk of aerosols. In the following months, the industry bounced back somewhat. Lockdowns eased, PPE supply increased, and employment rose. Two years later, dental employment is up, but the return to pre-pandemic patient volume has lagged. The main reason? Turnover. And many factors suggest that the current hiring crisis will not go away any time soon. Burnout in dentistry is a major concern, as are fewer job candidates and rising competition in the job market.

Dentists and dental leaders need the right recruiting and retention strategies to overcome hiring challenges. Post-pandemic recruiting must look different than before because times have changed—and so have healthcare workers. For some dental practices, strong retention plans will be the way forward. Leveraging technology to increase efficiency, support staff, and maintain a smooth, seamless patient experience is another way dental offices can thrive amidst unprecedented labor challenges.



This eBook will cover:

- 1** Why dental administrators, assistants, hygienists, associate dentists, and specialists are resigning.
- 2** How dentists and dental practice leaders can stabilize staffing for their organizations to stay resilient.
- 3** What practical strategies dental practices must employ for recruiting and retention.
- 4** How technology helps prevent burnout and maintains a positive patient experience.

How We Got Here

In March 2020, the New York Times identified dentistry as one of the highest-risk occupations and settings for spreading coronavirus.¹ Dental hygienists, topped the list, receiving a score of 100 out of 100 for exposure to diseases and physical proximity to others. Employment in dentistry dropped to 44% of pre-pandemic levels.²

The following months saw a resilient dental industry bounce back. Medical professionals learned more about the virus and adapted. Lockdowns eased, and employment levels slowly returned to normal. By December 2021, dental employment even exceeded pre-pandemic levels.² Yet, the American Dental Association (ADA) Health Policy Institute (HPI) reports showed average patient volume hovering around 90% of pre-pandemic levels.³

In fact, HPI figures demonstrate a consistent gap in which patient volume has lagged behind employment levels between 14 and 25%.⁴ Sure, greater attention to infection control means slower set-up, so fewer patients can be seen. **Still, overall, data suggests that the number of employed dental assistants, hygienists, and dentists is insufficient to meet current practice demands.**

A recent survey by the ADA found that one out of three dentists were recruiting dental hygienists and that 92% found recruitment extremely or very challenging.⁵ These numbers are evidence of a high turnover rate in dentistry today. Some positions may be filled by temp staff. At the same time, other positions have become a revolving door. Practices are struggling, because even when they do hire staff, employees don't always stick around.



Why the Hiring Crisis Won't Go Away Any Time Soon

Like other healthcare sectors, dentistry is facing a severe hiring crisis. Dentists and dental practices are finding it harder to find and retain the right talent. And unfortunately, the writing on the wall says the current hiring crisis may not go away any time soon.

Here are some of the reasons behind current staffing shortages:

- Workers choosing early retirement
- Voluntary departure due to workplace safety concerns and insufficient childcare⁶
- Healthcare worker burnout⁷
- A desire for greater work-life balance, some only want to work part-time
- Fewer graduates entering the profession⁸
- Intense job market competition driving up pay rates
- Long COVID affecting the dental workforce⁹

Dental hygienists and chairside assistants are in high demand. However, an industry survey by Dental Post found that dental front office workers have the highest risk for team turnover in the next year.¹⁰ As many as 30% could leave their job for higher-paying positions. And their administrative experience equips them to move out of dentistry into other healthcare-related fields.

A report on dental assistants said that 31–41% of dental assistants intend to look for a new job within the following year.¹¹ The top reasons for job dissatisfaction were feeling underpaid and working in a “bad work environment.”

In many markets, workers are asking for unrealistic pay or benefits above the customary range for their experience and location. These challenges strain dentists who still struggle with lower-than-normal patient volumes, rising overhead costs, inflation, and necessary practice purchases related to the pandemic. That’s why effective recruiting and retention for dental offices are more important than ever.

Recruiting Strategies

It's no secret that hiring for a dental practice now differs from the past. Here are ways to improve old recruiting strategies.


ATTRACT THE RIGHT TALENT

- 1 Use social media.** 60% of positions are filled through networking. So, dentists and dental leaders should take advantage of their social networks to increase the reach of each job posting to find more candidates. LinkedIn posts, Facebook groups, and personal accounts are a few platforms to post jobs on. In addition to posting jobs, share resources, tips, and relevant news to become an authority in your field.
- 2 Partner with local dental schools.** One key to recruiting is becoming a sought-after employer. Get your name out in the community and earn a good reputation; the right candidates will come to you. Start or maintain relationships with local schools for dental assisting and dental hygiene. Look for opportunities to give short presentations or offer students office tours. These simple acts will position you as a top employer in the job market for new grads.
- 3 Ask for employee referrals.** You should have an employee referral program with a financial incentive. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, employers spend an average of \$4,425 per job in associated hiring expenses.¹² Offering a fraction of that to employees who find great applicants encourages staff and saves employers money. Not to mention, this method helps you find job applicants with good references from trusted people (your current employees!).



ENGAGE AND HIRE THE BEST

- 1 Conduct an honest appraisal of your compensation and benefits package.** Research your geographic area by viewing job postings or asking trusted colleagues.¹³ You can also ask employees what they like/don't like about the current package and what would be most valuable to them (e.g., remote work, flexible schedules). If you offer a competitive package, you will see more candidates. A \$2 per hour increase equates to around \$4k per year—still less than the cost of hiring another person. You may also consider a sign-on bonus. Investing in the right person will pay off when you aren't shelling out more for recruiting, interviewing, and training later.
- 2 Give job applicants a "VIP Experience."**¹⁴ Up your recruiting strategies to make candidates feel excited about working at your organization. The expectation in the past was to be respectful of an applicant's time and answer any questions they had. But in today's competitive market, employers must go above and beyond to stand out. Remember that they are interviewing you as much as you are interviewing them. Dental service organizations (DSOs) need to engage with candidates on a personal level early in the recruiting process to attract and hire the best.¹⁵
- 3 Make quick decisions and follow through.** In this tough market, you can't afford to take your time. If you wait longer than one week to decide on a candidate, they may already have accepted another position.¹⁶ Be transparent about the interview process with applicants during the interview process. Let them know about your timeline and what the next steps will be. Ask them to let you know if they've received offers elsewhere so you have the opportunity to extend an offer if you think they're a good fit. Keep them engaged with updates if you have a specific reason for not moving forward timely, for example, an illness in the office. Keeping a candidate up to date through the process is another way your DSO can stand out in a positive way among other practices.

 **And remember, if you aren't getting enough activity on open job postings, don't be shy about going back through past resumes. You can recruit through candidates you may already have on file. Those who interviewed in the past may not be actively looking for work but open to opportunities. Or they may know someone right for the job.**

Retention Strategies

Dental leaders hired small teams for their practices in the past, and those teams often stayed intact for years until they retired. Today's office culture is different, and retention has become an increasing challenge.

Even if you aren't currently looking to hire anyone, you need to know how to hold onto your most valuable resource—*your employees!*

Here are three practical keys to retention for your dental practice.

PREVENT BURNOUT

Burnout prevention is an essential aspect of managing a workforce in post-pandemic healthcare. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines burnout as a syndrome triggered by chronic workplace stress that has not been managed effectively.¹⁷ The three main signs include exhaustion, lower productivity, and increased mental distance from one's job.

The following may contribute to burnout in dentistry:

- High patient load and time pressures lead to exhaustion from the workload
- Insufficient control over resources to provide effective services
- Lack of social support
- Poor physical work environment
- Lack of recognition and appropriate reward
- Occupational hazards (exposure to pathogens or injuries) increase work stress

Dental practices must mitigate the effects of burnout to retain staff and keep employees longer.

To build a resilient practice, offices should:

- Identify signs of burnout in employees, and intervene early
- Recognize hard work with financial and emotional rewards¹⁸
- Automate or reduce repetitive tasks to ease workloads
- Foster a sense of belonging through meetings
- Welcome employee input and show staff they are valued

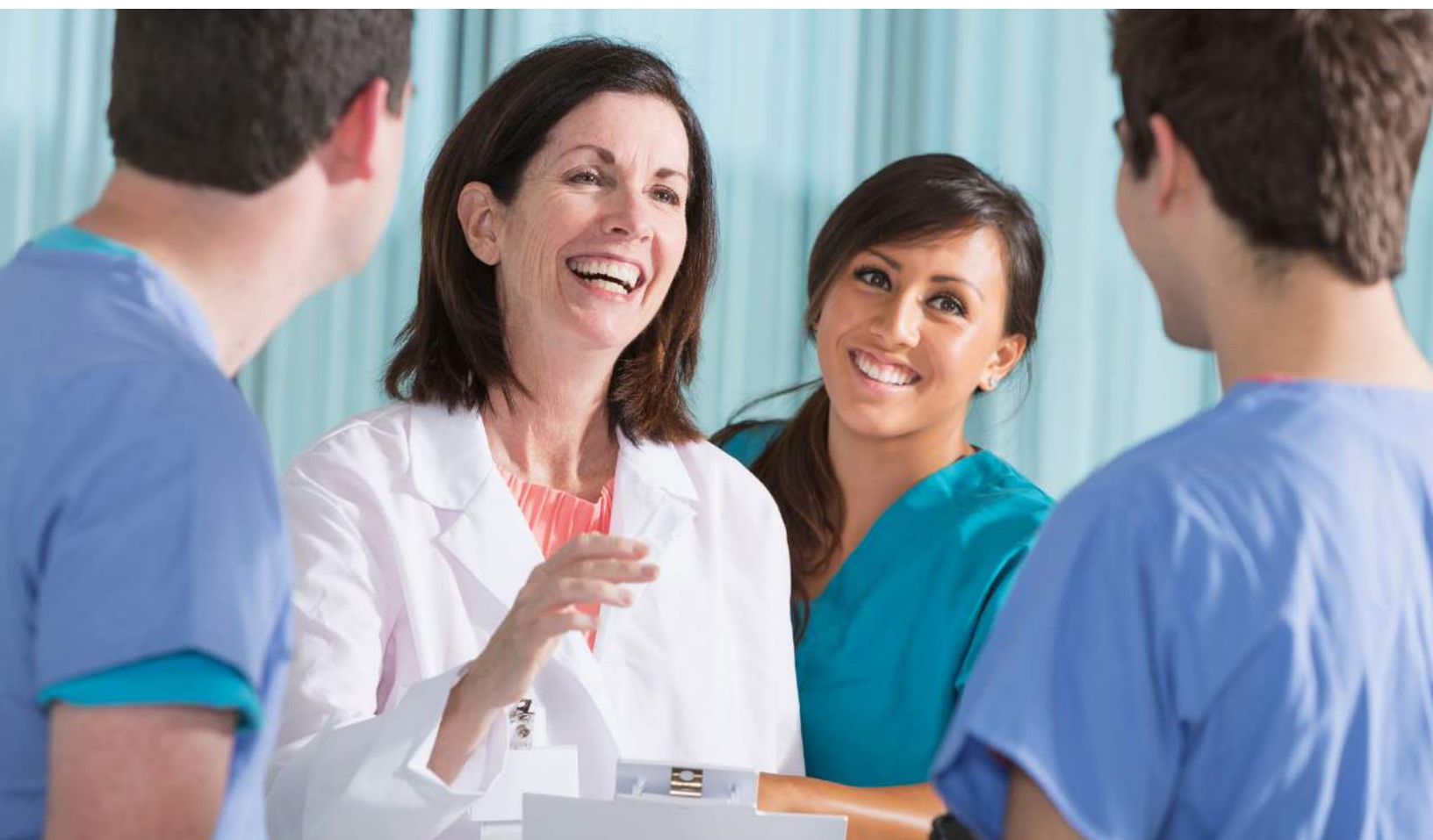
Employee well-being can lead to higher productivity and profits. The WHO reports that every \$1 spent on workplace strategies for better employee mental health will yield an ROI of \$4.00.¹⁹

VALUE EMPLOYEES

When staff members feel valued, they are more likely to help your practice weather any storms and conversely, it's your responsibility to mitigate any potential for burnout. The first step to showing that you value employees is by checking in with them regularly. Make time in your day to ask how they are doing, professionally and personally. Establish trust and listen when they express concerns.

Additionally, employers can implement formal check-ins through surveys and scheduled meetings to gauge employee sentiment. But it is also important to establish a friendly working relationship through conversation.

In addition to nurturing relationships with employees, dentists, and dental leaders should also encourage team building to maximize relationships among co-workers and create a positive work environment for all. Any effort you put into building a cohesive team that works well together will surely help employees feel valued—and increase efficiency.



INCREASE EFFICIENCIES

One tangible way to combat burnout is by improving the efficiency of your practice. Making processes easier will ease the burdens that can lead to workplace stress and in turn, reduce turnover.

Here are four ways to enhance efficiencies and streamline workflows so practices can maximize their dental care.²⁰

- 1 Schedule smarter with technology.** Today's scheduling applications offer online scheduling to help dentists see gaps in the schedule and manage staff better. They also lighten the load for front office staff. Automated appointment reminders and text messaging systems can reduce cancelations and optimize office schedules.
- 2 Take advantage of cloud-based systems.** Physical paperwork slows processes and creates security risks. It's also tedious for your staff to manage. The right dental practice management software improves organization, protects information, and automates tasks for your staff. It's also a huge time-saver when it comes to scheduling, viewing x-rays, or accessing records.
- 3 Consolidate patient care systems.** Many dental providers use multiple systems for their practice management needs. While it's better than paper, using multiple digital tools slows down workflows. Consolidating everything within one patient care platform simplifies toggling back and forth between schedules, notes, and billing. For DSOs with multiple locations, having a single practice management solution makes it easier to centralize business operations.
- 4 Flexible work arrangements.** Another benefit of cloud-based solutions is the anytime, anywhere access that they offer for you and your staff. This allows for flexibility and remote working arrangements that have become commonplace following the pandemic.

When you increase efficiencies, you empower your employees to accomplish more each day without overloading them with administrative tasks. This not only reduces burnout and turnover but it also allows them to focus on more rewarding aspects of their work like patient care. Using the right technology can help you improve your employee and patient experience while helping you navigate the ongoing hiring crisis.

How Planet DDS Solutions Can Help

Workplace safety concerns, burnout, increased job market competition and other factors have led to a shortage of dental professionals. And the hiring crisis isn't likely to resolve any time soon. That's why DSOs and dental practices who implement longer-term strategies will be able to attract and retain talent during this ongoing shortage.

Better technology solutions, like Denticon Practice Management, Apteryx XVWeb Cloud Imaging, and Legwork help practices accomplish more each day while reducing burdensome administrative tasks and inefficiencies. Our cloud-based solutions enable your team to collaborate easier through anytime access, automate reporting, patient communication, and streamline imaging. Learn more by speaking with someone from our team about how our solutions can help your practice or DSO.

Planet DDS's Denticon, Apteryx, and Legwork are proven cloud-based dental practice management and imaging solutions in today's market among private practices, private group practices, and emerging, midsize, and large DSOs.



**Learn about how Denticon, Apteryx, and Legwork
can make working in a dental office easier.**

SCHEDULE A DEMO

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Planet DDS is the leading provider of cloud-enabled dental software solutions serving over 10,000 practices in North America with over 60,000 users. The company delivers a complete platform of solutions for dental practices including Denticon Practice Management, Aptyx XVWeb Cloud Imaging, and Legwork Patient Relationship Management. Planet DDS is committed to creating value for its dental practice clients by solving the most urgent challenges facing today's dental practices in North America.