

**COMMUNICATION**

**CHECKLIST #1**

**MANAGEMENT AND DOCUMENTATION OF AFTER-HOURS TELEPHONE CALLS FROM PATIENTS**

The failure to properly handle and document after-hours telephone calls can adversely affect patient care and lead to potential liability exposure for the dentist. Should an undocumented telephone conversation become an issue in a lawsuit, the jury may be more likely to believe the recollections of the patient.

|  | <b>YES</b>               | <b>NO</b>                |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. A system is in place to help ensure that all after-hours calls are responded to in a reasonable time frame and are documented in the patient's record.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Record documentation of after-hours calls includes the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patient's name</li> <li>• Name of the caller, if different than the patient, and the individual's relationship to the patient</li> <li>• Date and time of the call</li> <li>• Reason or nature of the call, including a description of the patient's symptoms or complaint</li> <li>• Advice or information that was provided, including any medications that were prescribed</li> </ul> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. If the patient's condition warrants the prescription of medication, it is important to inquire about and document any medication allergies, as well any other medications the patient is currently taking.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. If used, the answering service is periodically evaluated for courtesy, efficiency, accuracy, and proper recordkeeping.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. When after-hours coverage is provided by another dentist's practice, a process is in place to ensure that documented telephone conversations are promptly forwarded to our office.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Answering machines or voicemail systems for after-hours calls are not recommended for the following reasons:

- There are no safeguards in the event of a malfunction.
- Patients do not always understand that no one will call back, even if this is stated in the message.
- If, as a last resort, an answering machine or voicemail must be used, the message should be brief, simple, and include: The office is now closed. If you believe you are experiencing a medical emergency, please disconnect and call 911.