

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.

	YES	NO
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"> • Patient's name • Name of the caller, if different than the patient, and the individual's relationship to the patient • Date and time of the call • Reason or nature of the call, including a description of the patient's symptoms or complaint • Advice or information that was provided, including any medications that were prescribed 	<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.