

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Digital photography is a key component to any dental practice. A dental assistant who is working for a modern practice should be able to take edit, and present digital photos independently.

A dental practice cannot thrive without even this basic level of technology. Although we may be able to see dental disease on an x-ray, patients have no idea how to read an x-ray. If we take digital photos, we can show them something that makes more sense to them. Often, patients have no idea what their teeth look like—especially their upper molars. Those are impossible to see without assistance. And some people never look at their teeth at all. And those people probably don't brush their teeth either. But I digress...

Let's keep this idea very simple.

For a moment, pretend that you are a dental patient with no technical dental knowledge. Which of the following two scenarios would make more sense to you as a patient?

1. Having a consult where the doctor explains your dental needs and shows you the x-rays?
2. Having a consult where the doctor explains your dental needs, shows you the x-rays, and shows you actual digital photos of all of your teeth?

Patients are more likely to agree and complete their treatment if they can see and understand why they need treatment—especially if they aren't in any pain—but have obvious dental needs.

ATTENTION DOCTORS: These photos are for showing your patients, not necessarily for dental journals. They don't have to be picture perfect, just centered enough and detailed enough for the patients to see.

Digital photos of your actual patients are also great marketing tools to use for your practice—especially before and after photos to really showcase the doctor's work.

Take a look at the following x-ray film. If you were not able to read an x-ray, can you easily understand what the problem is with tooth #2? Now, take a look at this digital photo. Can you more see a problem now? Which one do you think will be easier way to convey a dental need to a patient?



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Here are some tips that can help with digital photography in your practice. Every office is different. Every camera is different. It would be nearly impossible to advise you on exactly how to take photos, but we can give you some guidelines.

-  It can be helpful, depending on your camera, to have two people take photos—one to take the photos, and the other to help with retraction, defogging the mirror with air, and clearing the teeth of saliva bubbles.
-  Be familiar with your camera. Some offices use an intra-oral camera. Some offices use a DSLR camera. Some offices have special lenses and settings for their camera. Learn about your camera and how to use it.
-  Understand which photos you are taking and why. Some offices take a subset of photos on new patients, but different photos for orthodontics. Know when your practice would take photos and understand which photos are the best types to take for various appointments.
-  Be comfortable with your retraction techniques. Dental retractors can be uncomfortable, so practice using them before going live on a patient. Practice carefully placing retractors on yourself and on your coworkers.
-  Don't be in a fog. If you use mirrors, sometimes they can get foggy from the patient's breath. If you are taking photos by yourself, have the patient take a deep breath in right as you take the photo because that will clear the mirror. If you are have someone helping you, have that person blow some air on the foggy mirror to keep it clear.
-  Keep the teeth saliva free as best you can by blowing away bubbles. The pictures will be rather meaningless if the teeth are covered in saliva bubbles.
-  Understand your uploading process. Do you have the type of camera connection where the pictures show up immediately or do you have to physically upload them onto a computer?
-  Know how to edit. Often photos need a little cropping and/or rotating for better presentation.
-  Practice taking photos and having photos taken on you so you can better understand the process.

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Here are some examples of digital photography. Interestingly enough, these photos were taken by a brand new dental assistant who had just completed the Digital Photography training section of this Survival Guide!



DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT

GOAL: To understand your practice's specific Digital Photography system.

LOGISTICS: Answer the following questions.

What type of camera does your practice use for digital photography?
What settings should be used for specific photos?
For what appointment types does your practice take digital photos?
Which photos does your practice take for those appointment types?
What retraction is used for photos?
How are photos uploaded?
How are photos edited/cropped?
Who presents/discusses photos with the patient?
Who should be contacted and what is the office protocol if the camera malfunctions?
How are the camera batteries replaced/recharged?
Practice taking at least five sets of photos on a coworker before going live on a patient.

Date of completion:

Reviewed with doctor/manager:

Initial after satisfactory completion: