

Minimal Standards for Orthodontic Consultants

... get what you pay for!

By Dr. Dean C. Bellavia

Most orthodontists want a smoothly operating, minimally stressful, harmonious, efficient and productive practice that provides exceptional treatment and services beyond what the patient expects. Unfortunately, most doctors cannot attain that goal without help. Fortunately, there are helpful services provided by orthodontic consultants, but these services can be costly in consulting fees and practice disruption. Most consultants are competent and helpful, but some should be avoided, especially those making outrageous claims about the effects of their services. Over the past 33 years it has become apparent to me that standards should be applied when hiring or re-hiring orthodontic consultants. These standards indicate the ultimate goal of the specific service and what must be minimally accomplished to attain that goal.

Some consultants specialize in just one service (office design, etc.), others provide a few services, and a few provide all services. Whether they provide one service or all they must still adhere to minimal standards to be effective and provide the orthodontic practice with effective services. It is the prerogative of the orthodontist to hire one or more consultants, but if the consultants' areas of expertise overlap and their philosophies differ, there will be problems. With this in mind, the following services include a goal and the minimal standards required to attain that goal.

Team Organization System Standards—To have the consultant create an efficient and effective organizational structure with well-trained team members working in positions they are naturally inclined to do well in—this is accomplished through:

- An effective organizational structure for the practice's present size and for growth
- Initial evaluation of each team member's ability to function well in a position
- Effective hiring and training programs for new team members
- Ongoing evaluation of each team member's effectiveness
- The use of appropriate bonus programs to stimulate growth and effectiveness
- Design of an Office Policies/Benefits Manual
- Implementation of relationship programs to assure team harmony
- A system for retiring ineffective team members

Scheduling System Standards—To have the consultant work with the practice to design a scheduling system that includes all of the appointments required to treat the patients, according to the doctor's treatment philosophy, for the maximum number of patient treatments that the facility can accommodate—this is accomplished through:

- The collection of statistical data and analysis of the doctor's Tx Mechanotherapy
- Determining/redesigning the Facility (chairs, equipment, instruments, etc.) for maximum production
- Working with all team members for maximum input and to make it *their* system
- Scheduling calculations and design of a system that maximizes growth and team utilization
- On-site installation of scheduling system with all team members
- Ongoing critiquing and improving on use of scheduling system
- Recall, missed appointment, and cancellation control systems

Patient Treatment Management System Standards—To have the consultant establish systems for monitoring patient treatment, thus assuring that the patient completes his treatment in a timely manner—this is accomplished through:

- Effective records, imaging and diagnostic systems, treatment planning systems, etc.
- An effective Treatment Charting system
- An effective Patient education (cooperation) program
- A system of patient cooperation letters and conferences to maximize patient cooperation
- 6-Month Patient Treatment Review system

- Effective starting, ongoing and end of treatment DDS communications (forms and letters)

Accounts Receivables System Standards—To have the consultant establish systems that assure that all treatments are properly charged, have realistic financial agreements, and have payments collected with minimal past due accounts—this is accomplished through:

- Calculating fee schedules, setting financial agreements, and controlling miscellaneous charges
- Daily Cash Control systems to make sure that what comes in the door gets in the bank
- Past Due Accounts systems to limit and process past due accounts
- An accounts receivable control system that accounts for all charges, payments, and adjustments
- An insurance control system that collects all payments

Purchasing & Inventory Control System Standards—To have the consultant help the practice to identify the types, levels and lowest cost of all supplies required to provide patient care, so that there is neither an excess nor shortage—this is accomplished through:

- A system for determining levels of all supplies required
- Organizing supplies storage for easy inventory control
- A system for obtaining the best prices (meeting sales, clubs, specials, etc.)

Accounts Payable Control System Standards—To have the consultant establish systems that make sure that all vendors are accurately paid on time, thus avoiding late penalties while taking advantage of early payment discounts—this is accomplished through:

- A system that verifies all invoices and statements received
- A payables system to write and account for vendor checks
- A system that traces all payment categories for budget control

Payroll Control System Standards—To have the consultant establish systems that assures that staff are accurately paid on time—this is accomplished through:

- A system to accurately account for hours worked
- Accurately calculation of all salaries, benefits, bonuses and deductions for each team member
- A system of office policies that defines all aspects of benefits and bonuses
- A payroll system available to produce payroll checks and pay the various governments, etc.

Statistics, Reporting and Goal-Setting Standards—To have the consultant establish systems that collect the required statistics and generate reports that monitor whether the practice is meeting its monthly goals, and if not, what to do about it—this is accomplished through:

- Gathering important, accurate monthly Statistics
- Reporting on statistics to monitor monthly Goal-Attainment
- Implementing systems to attain unmet goals (for example, marketing programs for more exams)
- Setting up and monitoring a yearly budget that is monitored monthly

Marketing System Standards—To have the consultant create a marketing plan that includes the most cost effective and simplest to use marketing systems, which attract the maximum number of new patient starts—this is accomplished through:

- A yearly marketing plan that specifies who does what and when, according to what budget
- Marketing through exceptional service
- An effective Treatment Coordinator program that maximizes the number of new patients started
- Effective forms and letters to communicate with patients, family, dentists and all referrers
- Marketing of referring dentists and their teams, schools and local organizations
- Marketing through “gimmicks” that attract the patient’s attention and referrals

Office Layout Design Standards—To have the consultant design an efficient, effective, and pleasing office layout that allows for maximum patient treatment in the comfortably minimal amount of space—this is accomplished through:

- A functionally efficient floor plan, with a smooth flow between all interrelated work areas
- An evaluation of the adequacy of existing equipment and furniture and replacement as required

- An attractive decor and use of the existing or expanded space

OSHA Compliance System Standards—To have the consultant evaluate the practice’s present use of Medical Records, OSHA Checklists, the Three Written Plans, Hazards Training, Team Member Hazard Classification, MSDS documents, etc., to comply with OSHA standards—this is accomplished through:

- Initial record keeping, vaccinations, and initial and periodic team member training, etc.
- OSHA Safety procedures, including Hazardous Materials and Hazardous Waste control systems
- Ongoing daily, weekly and monthly checklist monitoring systems

HIPAA Compliance System Standards—To have the consultant evaluate the practice’s present use of Medical Records, Insurance correspondences, etc., to comply with HIPAA standards—this is accomplished through:

- Providing the patient with a handout of the practice’s “Notice of Privacy Policies”
- Obtaining a “Acknowledgement of Receipt” from patient that they received the practice’s “Notice of Privacy Policies”
- Obtaining the patients’ approval for displaying their pictures on walls, computers, etc.
- Obtaining the patient’s approval for using their records for case studies, presentations, etc.
- Team training to avoid divulging patient ID or treatment information to others in oral or written form

Practice Transition (New Partner/Retirement) Program Standards—To have the consultant help the practice determine the best partner/buyer and the most advantageous manner for the transition—this is accomplished through:

- Effective timing of the transition, type of partnership, and evaluation of the new partner/buyer
- Calculation of the sale price, purchase plan and legal/accounting considerations
- Creation of harmonious relationships between the new partner and team in the transition period

Goal-Setting/Attainment Support Program Standards—To have the consultant help the practice set and monitor and attain realistic monthly goals—this is accomplished through:

- Accurate, adequate statistics to produce realistic monthly reports
- Setting and monitoring goal attainment
- Making the necessary system changes to meet goals that are not being attained
- Offering problem-solving advice for problems that occur with practice management and patient care

To apply the above standards the practice simply obtains a written plan from the consultant for the services to be provided and makes sure that the service plan meets the minimal requirements above to obtain the goal of the service. Also, a truly valuable consultant only makes *necessary* changes and involves the entire team when designing and installing what the team must view as *their* system. A consultant is the sum of his or her experiences, applying to your practice what seems to have worked in numerous practices in the past...but there are no guarantees. An intelligent, experienced consultant continuously improves his or her customized services to fit the needs of each practice: avoid the “one size fits all” consultant who never improves his or her services. With this in mind, use the above standards for hiring the best consultants for your practice for the services you desire.