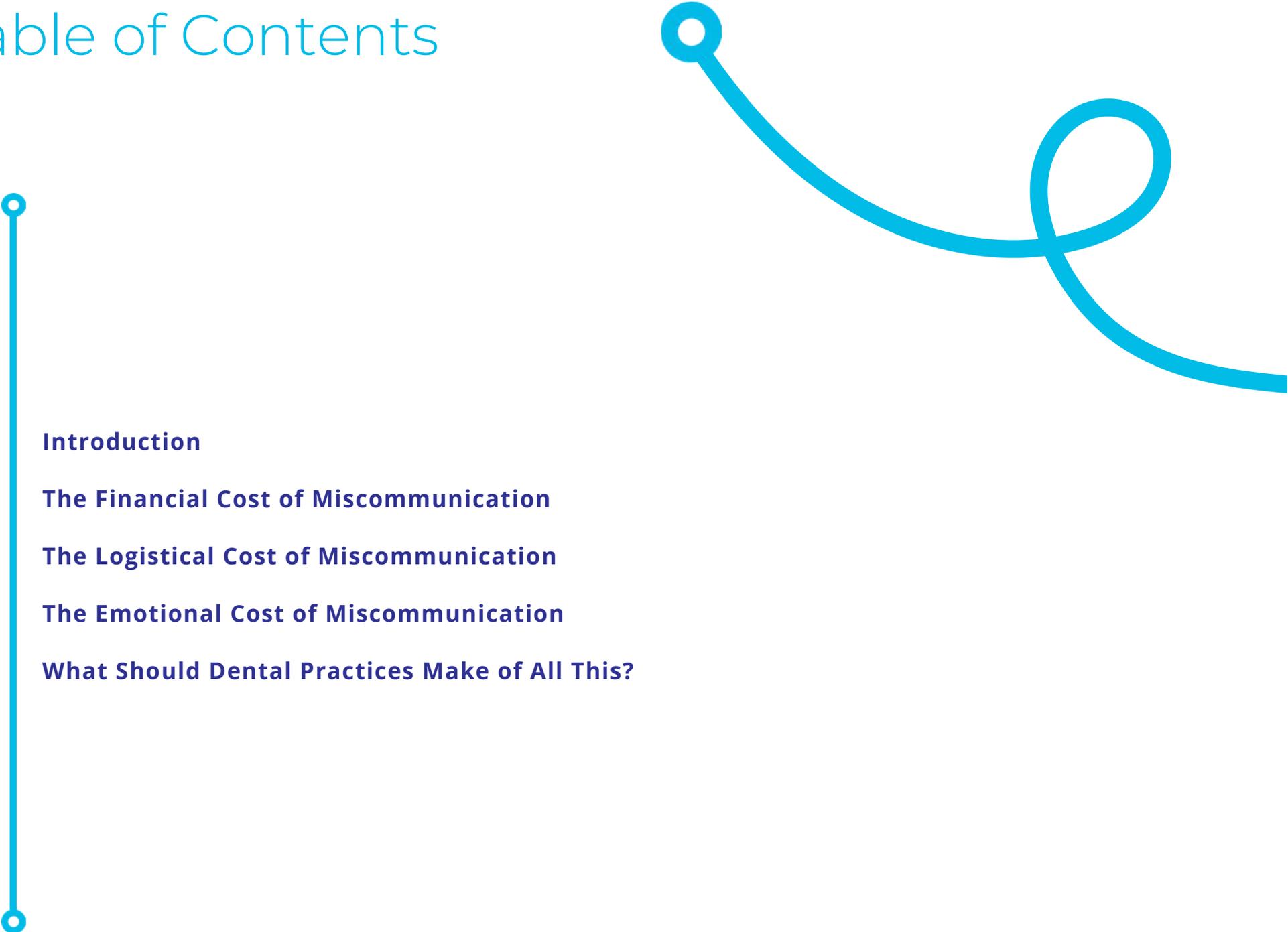




\$3 Million A Year:  
The Total Cost of  
Miscommunication



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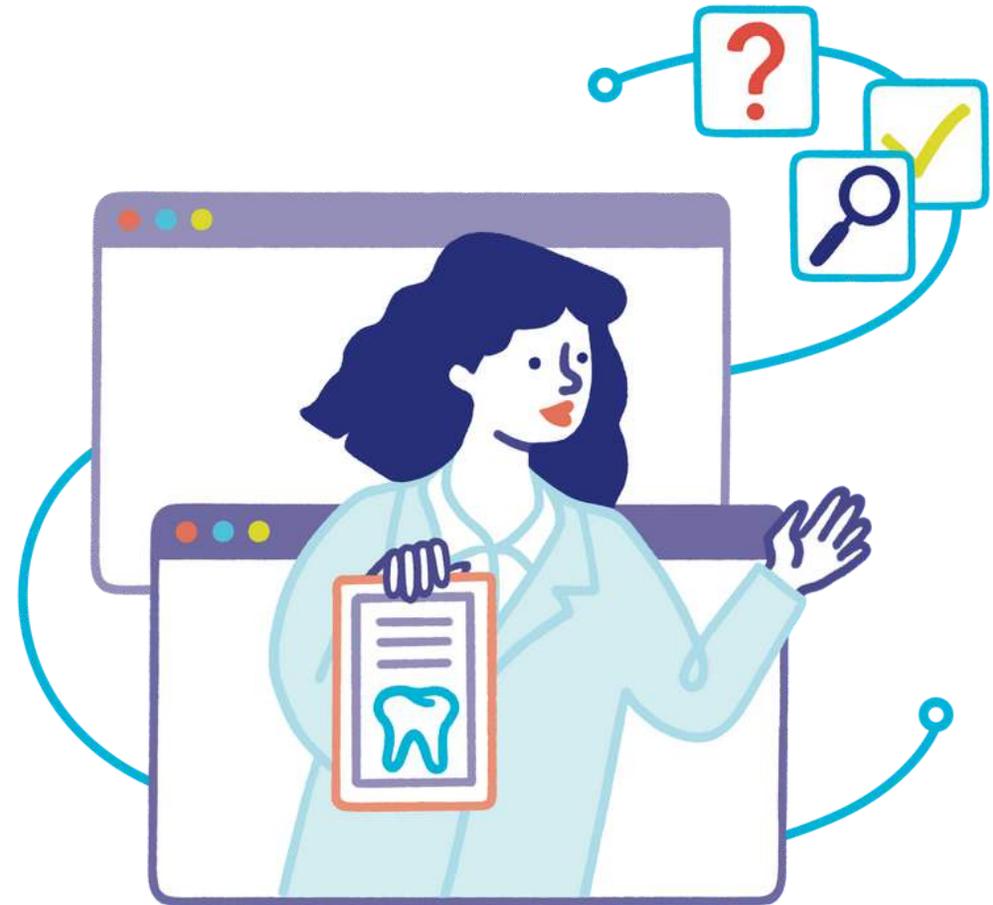
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# Introduction:

Most patient management software contains a few 'communication' features - but what if we told you that practices are still miscommunicating despite these tools?

The costs of miscommunication for dental practices can be high. This is true not only between dental practice and patient, but between practices themselves as well (such as communication for referrals). These costs are not always obvious, but in this guide, we will take a close look at what they are.

The good news is that identifying the causes of miscommunication has enormous benefits for your practice. Knowledge is power! Being armed with this understanding will equip you and your team to make the right choices for your practice.



# The Financial Cost of Miscommunication



# The Financial Cost of Miscommunication

When we think of the financial cost of miscommunication at a dental practice, one glaring thing immediately springs to mind: the cost of missed appointments.

In fact, about a third of all appointments get missed<sup>1</sup>, either due to no-shows, rescheduling, or cancellations. Many of these missed appointments are the result of miscommunication between patient and practice. What this means is that your practice could be making about a third more income than it currently is.

Depending on the type of appointment and practice, this could be costing your dental clinic between \$160,000 to \$2,000,000 every year.<sup>234</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10656597/>

<sup>2</sup> Average number of patient visits dentists have had annually since 2000 - Beckers Dental

<sup>3</sup> How Much Does a Dental Cleaning Cost? | Humana

<sup>4</sup> Root Canal Costs: With & Without Insurance | Byte®

# The Financial Cost of Miscommunication



This is a striking figure. But this is not where the costs of miscommunication end. Let's explore some examples of what the financial costs of miscommunication might include.

**Costs of labor.** How many extra hours is your staff spending on managing the outcomes of miscommunication? To put this in context, dental office managers making an average of \$30/hour in the United States<sup>5</sup>. But, of course, the dental practice is also paying the dentist, dental assistant, and so on<sup>6</sup>.

Between all of these salaries that the dental practice has to pay out, your practice could be losing ~\$160,000 per year to labor costs spent on managing miscommunication issues.

<sup>5</sup>Salary: Dental Office Manager in United States 2024 | Glassdoor

<sup>6</sup>Dental Office Dental Clinic Organizational Chart: A Guide -The Manual

# The Financial Cost of Miscommunication

**Cost of losing staff.** Estimates put the loss of staff at between 6 to 9 months of that employee's salary<sup>7</sup>.

This could be costing your practice upwards of ~\$25,000 per employee per year, depending on the number of employees who choose not to stay with the practice.

**Cost of not retaining patients.** The lifetime value of a patient can be calculated at Total Lifetime Value = Value of a Single Patient + Value of Secondary Referrals<sup>8</sup>. Depending on what kind of practice you have, these values will be different! If your patient is spending \$500 a year and stays with your practice for 30 years, their lifetime value is \$15,000, in addition to any referrals they may bring in. If they bring in 3 patients who are also worth \$15,000 each, that means that each patient can be worth \$60,000 each. It's important to note that if your practice offers specialty procedures or oral surgery, this amount may be much higher.



<sup>7</sup> The Real Cost of Turnover in Healthcare | Oracle Canada

<sup>8</sup> Lifetime Value of a Dental Patient + Tips To Maximize It | Dandy

# The Financial Cost of Miscommunication



However, this is the lifetime value. If we consider it by the year (\$60,000 divided by 30 years), the yearly value of a patient is \$2,000. Remember that the average dentist's active patient base is about 1200 patients<sup>9</sup>, and attrition rate is about 10%<sup>10</sup>, for an average of 120 patients.

This means that your practice could be losing \$240,000 by not retaining patients.

**Cost of online patient advocacy.** Online reviews are one of the key ways that patients can advocate for their dental practices. In fact, one article notes that for any business, negative reviews can cost a business 70% of potential customer or patient growth<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup>The Average Patient Base That A Dental Professional Needs - Medical Marketing Guru

<sup>10</sup>Do You Know Your Dental Practice's Patient Attrition Percentage? - TNT Dental

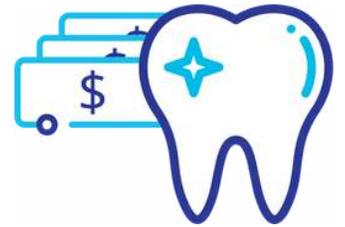
<sup>11</sup>How Much Will a Bad Online Reputation Cost Your Medical Practice? - Practice Builders

## The Financial Cost of Miscommunication

Let's say you have some good reviews - but aren't actively making an effort to gain more positive reviews. Even at only half of that figure - 35% - that's \$840,000 in lost potential patient growth (1200 x 35% x \$2000/patient).

### Let's look at our breakdown:

- Cost of Missed Appointments: **\$2,000,000**
- Cost of Labour: **\$160,000**
- Cost of Staff Turnover: **\$25,000**
- Cost of Lost Patients: **\$240,000**
- Cost of Lost Patient Growth from Negative Reviews: **\$840,000**



***All told, the financial cost of miscommunication for your practice is in the neighborhood of \$3,300,000 a year.***

# The Logistical Cost of Miscommunication



# The Logistical Cost of Miscommunication

The US' National Library of Medicine published a study<sup>12</sup> in late 2023 that was very revealing. When studying the electronic dental records of several thousand American dental practices, discovered this:

## 31% of all dental appointments were missed.

As we said in the first section, what this means is that potentially a third - or more - of your practice's logistical considerations revolve around missed appointments. These tasks include:

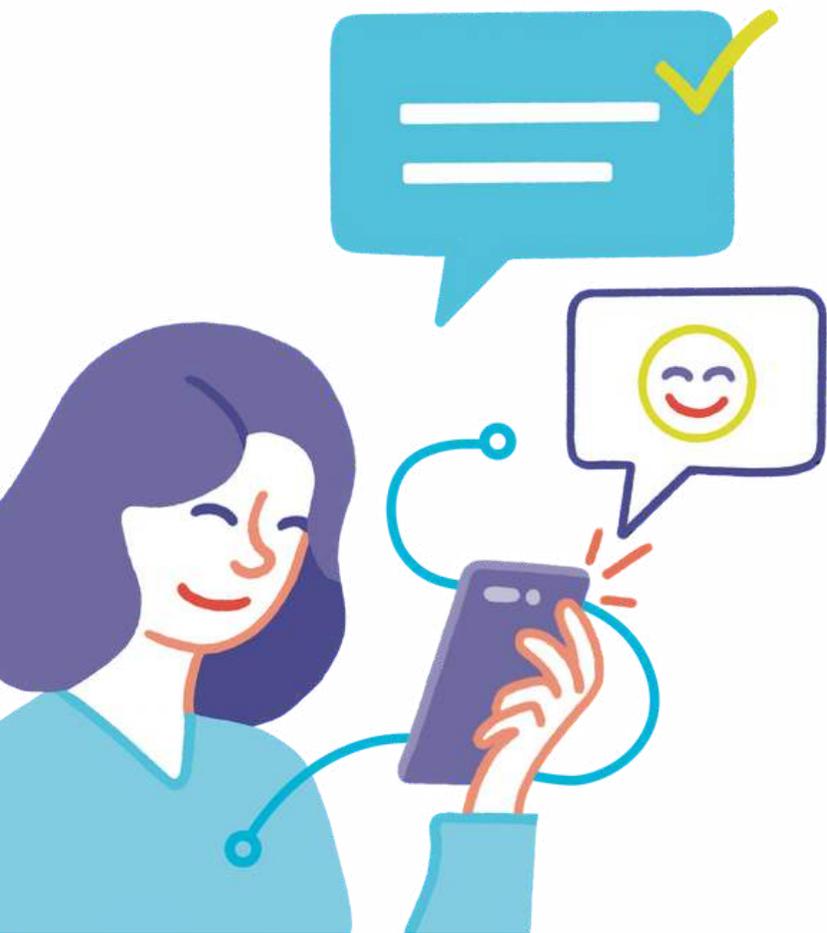
- Following up with patients who missed their appointments
- Re-booking new appointments
- Re-doing the messaging cadence that involves confirming and reminding about the appointment
- Ensuring the patient has the correct instructions for the appointment

The question is, what is happening the first time that messaging cadence takes place?



<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10656597/>

# The Logistical Cost of Miscommunication



Miscommunication between patient and dental practice can happen for a number of reasons. Some of these include:

- A method of communication that isn't meaningful to the patient - i.e., leaving a voicemail for a younger patient who would benefit from a text reminder
- Gaps in a messaging cadence - i.e., not enough reminders and requests for confirmations at the right times
- Issues with time management<sup>13</sup>- if missed appointments are already a feature of the dental practice, then there is a snowballing effect that means that staff are already pressed for time

While this is not an exhaustive list, what we do know is that miscommunication can result in your staff doing extra tasks - tasks that could have been avoided if communication had been different.

<sup>13</sup> Effective Dentist Patient Communication: 6 Barriers to Avoid - Revenue Well

# The Emotional Cost of Miscommunication



# The Emotional Cost of Miscommunication

This is a cost that can be challenging to measure, but we can see it turn up in other aspects of your dental practice. Specifically, we see it turn up in two places: in your staff's job satisfaction, and in treatment outcomes for your patients.

Miscommunication takes an emotional toll in any context. But, this is especially true in healthcare. Some of the emotional costs of miscommunication in healthcare include<sup>14</sup>:

- High stress outcomes for clinicians
- Decreased patient satisfaction
- Decreased job satisfaction and work-life
- Balance poor patient outcomes

If we reference some of the logistical costs of miscommunication, we can see how this feeds directly into poor work-life balance and job satisfaction for your staff. If they are constantly having to do tasks over and over that are the result of miscommunication, they are likely to be working late hours or through lunch breaks<sup>15</sup>. This eventually leads to burnout - or, indeed, to staff leaving their posts.



There is already a long history of anxiety among dental patients. For many patients, there is already a certain amount of emotional impact in visiting the dentist at all. Miscommunication between front-office staff or with the dentist only increases this emotional impact. Indeed, the positive emotional impact of clear communication between patients and their dental care providers has been well-documented<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Effects of Poor Communication in Healthcare - The HIPAA Journal

<sup>15</sup> <https://intiveo.com/blog/tired-of-working-through-lunch-patient-engagement-software-can-help-2/>

<sup>16</sup> Communication, Trust and Dental Anxiety: A Person-Centred Approach for Dental Attendance Behaviours - PMC (nih.gov)

What Should Dental Practices  
Make of All This?



## What Should Dental Practices Make of All This?

The good news is, as we say at Intiveo, that every challenge is an opportunity. Miscommunication is a fixable problem for every dental practice.

Armed with this information, your practice can start to identify where miscommunication is happening between you and your patients. Some questions to start asking are:

- Where is the team experiencing the biggest breakdown? Is it during an appointment reminder or a request for confirmation, for example?
- What logistical changes could be made to prevent this breakdown? What processes could look different?
- When patients give constructive feedback, what is that usually focused on? Could this be an area that inspires change?
- When your staff feel dissatisfied in their work, what is it that feels dissatisfactory? What could be improved? Could this be an area that inspires change?

If you begin by asking the right questions, then a strategy to tackle miscommunication will follow.



# Use Your Resources

Intiveo is proud to offer a number of resources to dental practices of all kinds. As the number one patient engagement choice for OMS practices and academic institutions in Canada and the United States, as well as serving general practitioners and many other specialties, we have the chance to speak to dental staff every day. This informs the resources we provide, including ROI calculators, templates packages, and guides to optimizing patient engagement. Check out our resources to support you on your journey towards efficient, optimized communication!

