

Use of Technology to Preserve PPE and Reduce Potential Exposure to Coronavirus

The ODA has received many calls with questions regarding the concept of cell phone triage.

With OSDB's recent guidance, Ohio dentists should feel comfortable in setting up a protocol using cell phone triage as a means of getting information from the patient regarding his or her condition in order to make a decision for next steps (i.e., have the patient come to the dentist's office for further diagnostic and/or emergency treatment, refer the patient to a specialist for further treatment, etc.) No special permit is required to do cell phone triage during this state of emergency.

The dentist may also wish to use additional commonly available technology tools to engage in this type of triage. The ADA points out that:

“During this pandemic our goal as dental care providers is to use telecommunication technology to triage patients and conduct problem-focused evaluations to limit office visits to only those patients who need urgent or emergency care. Thus, at this time, most dentists will potentially be leveraging telecommunication technology to provide limited scope (i.e., problem-focused evaluations and reevaluations) interactions with patients. This can facilitate providing advice and performing triage. It can also facilitate planning for in-person interactions should they become necessary.”

As to what technology to use, the ADA advises the following:

“Telephones that have audio and video capabilities are appropriate for virtual evaluations. During the COVID-19 public health emergency, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) will not impose penalties for HIPAA noncompliance against health care providers that serve patients in good faith through certain everyday communications technologies.

- DO NOT USE public-facing technologies (examples): Facebook Live, Twitch, and TikTok, etc.
- CAN USE (examples): Apple FaceTime, Skype, Facebook Messenger video chat, Google Hangouts video, Zoom”

The ADA points out that dentists “are encouraged to notify patients that these third-party applications potentially introduce privacy risks.” If possible, the dentist should have the patient consent to the use of these applications as a way to avoid in-person dental appointments during this pandemic while acknowledging the heightened risk to privacy.

The bottom line is that dentists and patients in Ohio have the ability to use technology (pictures, videos, FaceTime, etc.) commonly available on their cell phones or other devices to do real time triage to assist patients with their oral health emergencies while preserving PPE and limiting possible exposure to COVID-19.

Payment

Paying for these services is an entirely separate manner. Just because the OSDB allows dentists to do something like cell phone triage does not mean that dental benefits companies or Medicaid will necessarily pay for such services.

Many commercial dental benefits companies have recently stated that they are open to some form of reimbursement for this approach. One company wrote in a message to certain ODA member dentists that it understood that “dental offices are restricting services to urgent or emergency cases only,” and that “some offices have the capability to perform evaluations via audio or video technology.” Accordingly, the company declared that “Unless there is a specific exclusion, [the dental benefits company] will benefit D0140 (Problem Focused Examination) per group contract whether provided in a dental office or virtually effective March 20, 2020 until the public health situation is resolved.”

Another dental benefits company wrote in an email to certain ODA member dentists that “In response to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic and the ADA guidance that dentists should focus on emergency care, [the company] is making a temporary expansion to our claims policies for Teledentistry.” According to the company, it “will now approve CDT Codes D9995 and D9996 when utilized to provide services” to its enrollees and that “when billing for these services,” the dentist should “submit procedure codes D0140, D0170, or D0171 for reimbursement.” The company indicated that this benefit will be available through May 31, at which time it will reassess the situation.

According to the ADA, the procedure codes that may be considered under this approach include:

Oral Evaluation

D0140 limited oral evaluation – problem focused - An evaluation limited to a specific oral health problem or complaint. This may require interpretation of information acquired through additional diagnostic procedures. Report additional diagnostic procedures separately. Definitive procedures may be required on the same date as the evaluation. Typically, patients receiving this type of evaluation present with a specific problem and/or dental emergencies, trauma, acute infections, etc.

D0170 re-evaluation – limited, problem focused (established patient; not post-operative visit) - Assessing the status of a previously existing condition. For example:

- a traumatic injury where no treatment was rendered but patient needs follow-up monitoring;
- evaluation for undiagnosed continuing pain;
- soft tissue lesion requiring follow-up evaluation.

D0171 re-evaluation – post-operative office visit

Case Management

D9992 dental case management – care coordination - Assisting in a patient's decisions regarding the coordination of oral health care services across multiple providers, provider types, specialty areas of treatment, health care settings, health care organizations and payment systems. This is the additional time and resources expended to provide experience or expertise beyond that possessed by the patient.

Teledentistry

When you are providing services in a teledentistry environment one or the other of the following codes would be reported in addition to those cited above:

D9995 teledentistry – synchronous; real-time encounter - Reported in addition to other procedures (e.g., diagnostic) delivered to the patient on the date of service.

D9996 teledentistry – asynchronous; information stored and forwarded to dentist for subsequent review - Reported in addition to other procedures (e.g., diagnostic) delivered to the patient on the date of service.

The ODA is advocating with private dental benefits companies and Ohio Medicaid and Medicaid dental manage care entities to encourage them to provide reimbursement for this approach to treatment during this time of crisis, which will assist in keeping patients out of the hospital emergency rooms, preserve PPE and limit potential exposure to COVID-19.

Actual reimbursement, however, will ultimately be determined by the dental benefits company you are billing.