Restorative control, scheduling freedom, staff empowerment: Today’s in-office CAD/CAM!

Author: Heather Hennen, DAII, CDD, CIS

Whether it’s the same day, next day or next week, in-office chairside CAD/CAM provides dental teams with the flexibility to meet patient and professional demands for excellent dentistry on their terms. That’s because today’s in-office chairside CAD/CAM is an empowering tool that enables dentists and their staffs to take complete control of several aspects involved with creating and delivering durable and esthetic all-ceramic restorations.

In-office chairside CAD/CAM systems allow every member of the dental team and their patients to benefit from powerful capabilities. Systems designed with intuitive software (such as the E4D Dentist System, manufactured by D4D Technologies), enable trained dental assistants and other team members to effectively design a beautiful, accurate restoration.

When utilizing the chairside CAD/CAM system that we have in our office, we benefit from features such as “rubber tooth,” which enables the user to manipulate any part of the restoration by clicking and pulling as if the restoration were made of pliable rubber. The ICEverything™ View allows the user to see 360 degrees of actual hard and soft tissue — both the preparation features and the structure of the tooth or teeth. This feature is incredibly useful because there is no need to cover the preparation with a contrast agent or reflective coating. The final resulting crowns, inlays, onlays or veneers are accurate, esthetic and predictable.

Steps in the treatment process — such as scanning impressions, digitally designing the restorations and selecting the appropriately colored ceramic block for milling — can be delegated to trained staff members who can expertly complete these tasks. When dental auxiliaries are trained as CAD/CAM Dental Designers (CDDs), their professional abilities soar and the pride and ownership they take in the practice, and their patients’ care, increases dramatically.

That, coupled with the inherent benefits associated with CAD/CAM restorations — such as increased accuracy from digital impressions, durable all-ceramic restorations, cost savings from reduced material use and efficient operatory room turnover — and in-office CAD/CAM becomes even more empowering. Patients enjoy appointments without messy and uncomfortable traditional impressions, treatments usually don’t require a temporary, restorations fit and feel more accurate and treatment is more conveniently scheduled.

Having visited many offices across the country, I know it can take time to transition chairside CAD/
CAM into the practice in a way that works best for a specific team. Fortunately, having the technology in the office makes it easy to schedule its use and accommodate patients who are ideal candidates for CAD/CAM restorations. Whether it’s the same day, next day or next week, the best way to determine how your CAD/CAM system will work for your practice is to try it. Create a plan for what you visualize for your practice and follow the steps necessary to execute it.

_Same-day dentistry_

For example, schedule same-day patients at 8 a.m., 11 a.m., and 2 p.m. Block your schedule for about two hours, which will allow ample time to complete the patient’s work. These times may be shortened to accommodate more same-day patients, but this is a good starting point. Patients can wait in a waiting area or choose to leave for an errand and return later. This would allow you to use your operatory for another patient, if needed.

Alternatively, plan to prepare same-day patients in the morning and have them return in the afternoon for delivery. This scenario requires more time for setup and breakdown, but may be best for a busy practice. Establish realistic expectations for the patient from the beginning; explain that every effort will be made to provide this wonderful service, but surgeries or other schedules that run behind could cause a delay that would require him or her to have a temporary.

Also, be sure to plan enough time to complete what is needed in a reasonable time frame. Allow more than a one-hour appointment for everything if it normally takes you 45 minutes to numb and prepare.

The benefits of same-day dentistry include accuracy and time and money savings. Having one appointment and keeping the restoration in-house optimizes profitability. With complete control over how information is collected and the result produced, there are no longer issues with contacts, embrasures or shade.

_Next-week or next-day dentistry_

CAD/CAM need not mean same day, every day for everything. Even if same-day dentistry isn’t the best option for your practice, CAD/CAM may still provide many advantages over conventional dentistry, including increased profitability.

A feasible option could be taking a digital impression rather than a conventional impression and keeping your patient on the same two-week delivery schedule you always had. The lab fabrication fees that you eliminate can make using your chairside CAD/CAM system as your “in-office lab” not only work well but also consistently increase your profitability. Additionally, you have full control over the outcome of your patients’ restorations, as well as the convenience of doing same-day dentistry if, and when, you choose.

Perhaps “next day” is best for your office. Patients can be scheduled for preparation on Mondays and Wednesdays, with delivery on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This is a very efficient way of utilizing the system, one that leaves the option, if needed, for performing same-day restorations for emergencies or special situations.

Some large group offices purchase the scanners and mills needed for their practices, but may have one office performing same-day dentistry while allowing their other offices to use it as their “lab.” In this scenario, delegate one or two people to operate the system. The software has features to simplify these situations.

Each office has its own dynamic and, therefore, will utilize its CAD/CAM system differently. The option of choosing one scenario and evolving will always be there. Many offices will combine all three of the options mentioned above and utilize the system for all it can offer. One thing is certain: No matter which path you choose, you will certainly realize a huge benefit in implementing chairside CAD/CAM into your practice!