Taking charge of oral hygiene

Procter & Gamble’s new Ortho Essentials program puts control in patients’ hands

By Kristine Colker, Managing Editor

There is no question that oral hygiene habits can be a source of much concern for both orthodontists and their patients. Good oral hygiene can be hard to come by in any patient, let alone in teenagers or adults who have mouths full of wires and brackets. And no matter how many times you might tell them that bad hygiene can lead to poor results and longer treatment times, there is only so much you can do. Right?

Wrong.

Thanks to Procter & Gamble, there is now a way of ensuring that not only are your patients brushing and rinsing as desired, but that they are engaged and having fun with the process as well.

Ortho Essentials is a three-step oral hygiene program designed to help orthodontists streamline and strengthen their oral hygiene control procedures by standardizing their check ups, consistently reporting their results and making sure patients improve their oral hygiene at home.

“I saw patients in my practice not ending up the way we wanted them to in regards to hygiene,” said Dr. Duncan Brown, the orthodontist behind the Ortho Essentials program. “I became enormously frustrated.”

Brown shared his concerns with other orthodontists, and together, they decided to come up with a common grading scale for quality control. That, coupled with a 2007 study done by Procter & Gamble scientists that showed that patients who used a regimen consisting of a oscillating/rotating power toothbrush and Crest Pro-Health toothpaste and rinse had up to 40 percent less plaque than those who used a manual toothbrush and a regular anti-cavity toothpaste, paved the way for the Ortho Essentials program.

“What’s unique about the program is that it combines the products with the process,” Brown said. “The approach has never been done like this before.”

The way the program works is simple. Each practice receives a kit that contains a five-level rating system ranging from poor to excellent. This rating system is supported by visuals on a Healthy Mouth Assessment Card, which helps illustrate each level so staff members and patients have a standard to compare. Every visit, orthodontists and their patients can go over results to see where the patient falls on the chart and see which areas of the mouth need some improvement.

“Hygiene needs to be individualized,” Brown said. “This way you can work on problem areas.”

Each practice also receives a contract for both the orthodontist and the patient to sign as well as all the tools a staff needs to track a patient’s progress.

Finally, patients are either given or are encouraged to purchase an Oral-B Triumph with SmartGuide Ortho Unit and Crest Pro-Health toothpaste and rinse for home use.

To further personalize the program, Brown suggests using a reward system. In his own practice, he said, good hygiene earns patients tokens, which they can then use to buy items. In addition, those patients who receive all fours and fives on their rating system chart are entered into a drawing for an iPod touch.

Dr. Leslie Winston, director of professional and scientific relations for Procter & Gamble, said the best thing about the Ortho Essentials program is that it doesn’t let orthodontists just react to poor care but instead empowers patients to take control of their oral hygiene.

“One of the most important things about the program is that we put so much control in patients’ hands and made them part of the process, which is so different than talking down to them and telling them what they should be doing,” Winston said. “The fact is we’re teaching them skills they can use for the rest of their lives.”

For more information about Ortho Essentials, including how to get started, visit www.dentalcare/ortho.