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e-PRACTICE

Effective Treatment Planning Using Dental Charting Software

In any healthcare field, accurate records are essential for optimal diagnosis. For dental professionals, these records include visual charts used to monitor the dentition's condition and/or the progress of periodontal treatment. Since periodontal measurement is generally performed by one of the dental hygienists, it is possible that different people may obtain this information at various points in the treatment. It is, therefore, often difficult to ensure that the amount of force applied in order to obtain these measurements remains constant throughout the staff. To increase the efficiency and accuracy of dental and periodontal charts, clinicians may employ the use of charting and probing software systems (eg, Florida Probe System, Florida Probe, Gainesville, FL).

> "Many charting systems are compatible with existing practice management software."

Software Benefits

Periodontal charting and probing systems use a constant force to obtain all necessary information for a thorough periodontal examination, including:

- Suppuration monitoring;
- Gingival recession;
- Record bleeding;
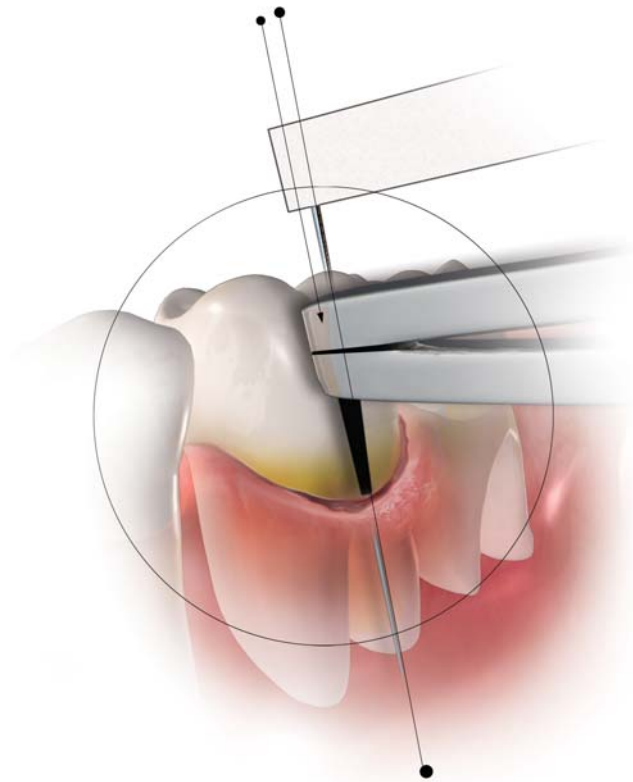- Plaque assessment; and
- Pocket depth.

Figure. While standard probing devices are capable of providing pocket depth information, use of a digitized evaluation system allows improved accuracy during initial assessment

Table. Periodontal Measurements and Their Indications

Stage of Disease	Measurement
Healthy	< 3 mm
Mild to moderate periodontitis	3 mm to 5 mm
Severe periodontitis	> 5 mm

This helps to ensure a standardization of measurements between operators. The system automatically records the data into electronic dental charts, both graphical and numerical, further reducing the chance for human error. Charting systems also provide a visual aid to treatment planning and explanation, and may be used to educate patients and increase treatment acceptance. As probing handpieces record the data, a voice will announce the status of the gingival and/or tooth so that the patient may hear it and take heed to the clinician's advice regarding treatment. Once the examination is finished, print outs of the charts provide an additional tool to educate the patients.

Office Integration

The greatest challenge of any new technology is the successful assimilation into a practice. Prior investments should not be rendered useless by the addition of new technology. When selecting a charting and/or probing program, existing practice management software should be taken into account. Many systems currently on the market are compatible with existing practice management software (eg, Dentrix G3, Dentrix, American Fork, UT; EagleSoft, Patterson Dental, St Paul, MN) to simplify integration with the dental office's existing routine. Furthermore, systems often feature voice commands that guide the user throughout the process, reducing the learning curve.

Conclusion

Careful monitoring of a patient's oral health can help detect periodontal disease in the early stages, preventing bone loss and possible surgery. Charting and probing software can improve a clinician's diagnostic capabilities by providing an organized, highly accurate record. The easy integration of these systems, coupled with the potential increase in treatment acceptance, make these systems a valuable asset to any practice.