

# Effective Record Keeping

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I have been professionally helping denturists with record keeping for 22 years. I taught a required course on the topic at NAIT for 4 years; I currently consult for various provincial colleges across Canada and provide required remedial training on charting where required; but most significantly I have worked directly with over 600 denturist clinics. I am telling you this because I have a very palpable understanding of what is effective and what gets denturists into trouble. The premise of good record keeping is the same for paper and electronic and the more common hybrid system. If your record keeping ever comes to a legal court, then a common question for that court is to find out “what is reasonably prudent and common practice in your industry.” More often the issue doesn’t reach a court and the issue is dealt with by the self-regulating authority in your province which is usually the college of denturists. The college has “recommendations and suggestions” and has a great deal of power fine or suspend denturists. I have found each province to vary greatly in the recommendations and suggestions and penalties and actions. It really depends on the individuals involved. It is beyond the scope of this article to address those specific differences. However, improving your record keeping habits is only going to help you no matter which province you work in! We can always do better and it is always good to strive to improve. So lets review some things you likely already know but may inspire you to improve :  
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## Protection

The patient record is an important defense against malpractice and official complaints. If you are using older software then it is likely this system is not adequate for the current standards of record keeping. Modern systems have change tracking mechanisms and security measures to protect you and your practice in the event of a patient complaint. Older systems that are easy to manipulate data without a record of doing so are not deemed adequate. Modern denturist software is electronically time date stamped and alterations noted accordingly. Modern electronic records are now the standard in Health Care. In 2016 the Health Minister Gaétan Barrette announced that Quebec will move toward the use of a single electronic health record system in hospitals across the province.

I can tell you that the majority of denturists who run into trouble for record keeping are the ones doing everything on paper still. This is not to say you can’t chart well using solely paper-based systems but rather it seems to be more a function of older denturists who have not progressed with industry standards. If you are in this category I would encourage you to try using a modern practice management system.

Paper is also at a disadvantage that On paper notes can easily be added or whole pages added at any time after the treatment without a means of knowing for sure when the note was made. This fact can make a paper records more suspect when compared to time dated computer records. In a dispute where a denturist produces a nice perfectly laid out and complete paper record they will often be audited to ensure that all records or randomly selected records have the same level of detail and professionalism. If most of the other records do not match this level of detail and professionalism then the paper record can be easily disputed. Installing a current practice management system and getting trained on current best practices of record keeping for denturists will give you confidence and piece of mind in your practice.

### **Profitability**

Part of good record keeping is ensuring quality of care for patients. This includes informing patients when their denture should be serviced. Patients with no natural teeth may not be seeing a dentist regularly and it becomes the responsibility of the dentist to ensure regular oral exams. Practice management software is very good recalling patients. Software can also keep track of missed or cancelled appointments. It is much easier for staff to look at the schedule and fill it with appointments using software rather than sifting through paper files. Office managers can use software to easily track the effectiveness of advertising and report where new patients and returning patients are coming from. Utilizing software to increase the patient care and profitability of a practice can be done in a hybrid system as well. A dentist can still chart the clinical aspects on paper and let the office manager record the financial aspects, claims, and appointments in the computer system. In this manner the dentist can do what he or she is comfortable with on paper and the clinic can still benefit from functions that software will help the clinic become more profitable and efficient.

### **Electronic Claim Submission**

Modern dentist software can send claims electronically to all insurance companies participating in DACnet. There are currently 26 insurance companies accepting claims electronically from dentists. A current list of insurance companies can be obtained at [www.dacnet.ca](http://www.dacnet.ca)

Insurance companies are constantly improving their systems. To find out exactly what kind of responses and service to expect from which company talk to a modern software provider. Ask your local product supplier or look at [www.dacnet.ca](http://www.dacnet.ca)

Before upgrading your system or adopting your first software get a demonstration and free trial if you can from several products and find the one that will work best for you. If you are using older software find out about data conversion possibilities so that you can transfer all your important data to the new system.

Adopting a modern practice management system will allow you instant access to information from multiple locations in or out of the office without having to look for files or misplacing files. All modern software will have a great reliable backup plan to keep your records safe and secure and easily restored. With an updated system you can become excited to be a business owner again and manage your practice efficiently and more profitably while providing better service to patients and getting claims adjudicated faster with electronic claim submission.