

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE: TRANSFORMING THE BUSINESS OF DENTISTRY

Examine the technology's initial impact, present-day value and future potential through the lens of Patterson's industry-leading solutions.

From elevating patient care to streamlining behind-the-scenes operations, modern dental practice management software (PMS) supports the business of dentistry at virtually every turn, providing vital solutions that drive practice growth. The first PMS systems were uniquely revolutionary – signaling the shift from analog to digital – but the capabilities have advanced continuously over the years, with each subsequent innovation proving transformative for the profession.

To trace the trajectory of PMS in dentistry, one need only look to a longtime leader in the space: Patterson Dental. Although the company's legacy extends back well over a century, in the past few decades, Patterson has cemented its position as an indispensable partner to the modern practice. Starting with its earliest, on-premises solution (EagleSoft) through to the company's latest, cloud-based platforms



(Fuse and Dolphin Blue), Patterson empowers its customers to harness the full benefits of digital technology, and, in turn, their businesses.

ENTERING THE DIGITAL WORLD

In 1997, Patterson acquired EagleSoft, Inc., then a burgeoning developer of one of the original dental PMS solutions. EagleSoft's introduction to the industry marked a watershed in patient care, because

the software, backed by Patterson's best-in-class support, enabled many offices to capitalize on paperless charting and digital imaging for the first time. "Patterson was one of the biggest early innovators in the space," explained Brad Joseph, Patterson's vice president of software product management. "Our software has had a major impact on moving dentistry from a world of film and paper charting to a digital experience, wherein

“We truly live by our core values and take care of our customers through our sales teams and the Patterson Technology Center.”

– *Brad Joseph, Patterson Dental VP of Software Product Management*

providers and staff can securely and efficiently manage high-quality patient care.” Going digital also had grand implications for dentistry beyond the clinical. With tools for patient scheduling, cash flow management, key performance indicator (KPI) tracking and more, Eaglesoft helps practices streamline front office workflows and vastly improve business operations.

Although EagleSoft, Inc. had just 25 employees and 1,000 customers at the time of acquisition, Patterson’s steadfast commitment to technological innovation and its customers led it to establish the Patterson Technology Center (PTC) in 2000, through which it could provide comprehensive technical support and training for PMS users. Today, the PTC supports over 100,000 customers nationwide, while Eaglesoft serves nearly 30,000 active users.

“Eaglesoft has been a proven performer for practices for over 25 years,” Joseph said. “It offers efficient clinical workflows, strong business management reporting and tools, as well as robust integration options.”

MOVING TO THE CLOUD

Tried-and-true server-based PMS

solutions like Eaglesoft remain practice staples, but the needs of dentistry are evolving, and software providers like Patterson are rising to meet the challenge. “We’re adapting to meet the needs of the future of dentistry with cloud-based software,” Joseph reported, attributing the demand for this technology to two primary forces. “Number one, we’re living in a world that has grown up with smartphones and Amazon,” he explained. “So, patients and our customers have different, higher expectations of what software looks like and what it can do.”

In the internet age, interfaces that are smart, responsive and deliver automatic, real-time updates are the norm, and dental professionals and patients – particularly those belonging to younger generations – want their dental experiences to be as easy and efficient as everything else they do digitally.

The second driver, Joseph noted, is the growth of the group practice and dental service organization (DSO) models. “Dentistry, historically, has been concerned with the single practice. But now you’ve got practices with more than one location, more than 10 – in some cases, more than 1,000 locations.”

In 1999, according to the American Dental Association (ADA), about 2 in 3 dentists were in solo practice. Two decades later, that proportion had decreased to 1 in 2, and among dentists under 35, just 1 in 4 was in solo practice in 2019. Likewise, the ADA estimates that at least 10% of all dentists in 2019 were affiliated with DSOs and found that the highest proportion of affiliates were younger than 35.

Although the traditional, solo way of doing dentistry is here to stay, all signs indicate that the trend toward group practices and the DSO model will continue, especially as older dentists retire and sell their businesses. “As the business of dentistry adapts beyond the private practice, the question becomes how do we help those offices work together?” Joseph said. “How can they see all their information across practices? How do we bring more procedures into those practices? That’s where the cloud plays a huge role.”



With its new, cloud-based products, Fuse and Dolphin Blue, Patterson meets the needs of the modern practice with equally modern solutions. Both provide intuitive interfaces with smart dashboards, allowing offices on-demand access to patient information across locations; the ability to view, sort and filter data in real time; and the option to effortlessly switch between tasks. Like all Patterson software products, Fuse and Dolphin Blue also include

integration with imaging, revenue cycle management (RCM) and patient relationship management (PRM) solutions, ensuring practices have everything they need right at their fingertips to take care of patients and efficiently run their business.

FACING THE FUTURE

Looking forward, the software solutions that Patterson offers today hold even more potential for changing the dental game. Not far down the line, practices can expect greater workflow efficiency out of their PMS systems, both in clinical and operational areas, thanks to advances in artificial intelligence. This will enable more automation of operatory and front desk workflow, consequently easing staff burden and freeing them to focus on patients.

Tighter integration of PMS with PRM and RCM solutions also is on the horizon. PRM promises more opportunities for practices to engage patients, and in ways they want to connect (think simplified scheduling and electronic reminders versus phone and paper communications). This not only facilitates new patient acquisition, but also drives more effective scheduling and recare of existing patients, promoting increased treatment acceptance, production and practice profitability. On the other hand, further integration with evolving RCM solutions means getting higher percentages of insurance claims paid in a faster cycle time, plus availability of different payment options for patients. The benefit here is increased revenue for the practice and reduced outstanding accounts receivable.

DIVING INTO DOLPHIN

Much like Eaglesoft helped revolutionize clinical and business operations for the general practice, Dolphin imaging and management software – which Patterson added to its product portfolio in 2008 – proved game changing for orthodontics and other dental specialty clinics. The foundation of the Dolphin product suite is Dolphin Imaging Plus, which allows clinicians to effortlessly capture, organize and present 2D and 3D digital images. The ability to easily convey treatment plans and communicate ideas with Dolphin’s powerful and user-friendly tools exemplifies the value of dental PMS and is key to understanding why thousands of dental professionals worldwide have relied on Dolphin solutions for more than 30 years. “Dolphin products are leaders in orthodontic imaging,” Joseph said. “They have a passionate user base who help us continue to innovate.”



A PARTNER THROUGH IT ALL

The future certainly looks bright, but the road ahead isn’t without its challenges. Currently, offices continue to struggle with labor shortages and high staff turnover. Couple this with the fact that adopting novel technologies remains daunting, and it’s easy to imagine that many practices feel a good deal of uncertainty at the prospect of keeping up with the times.

“These kinds of changes can be scary,” Joseph empathized. “But nobody supports the customer in this change journey like Patterson does.” Partnering with Patterson means more than just receiving high-performance software products. “In addition to developing a lot of the tools and processes offices use,” Joseph said, “we truly live by our core values and take care of

our customers through our sales teams and the Patterson Technology Center.” Whether it’s picking out the perfect software solution, transitioning to a new system or troubleshooting an unforeseen issue, Patterson’s expert sales, training and support teams are positioned to make the customer experience successful and stress-free from start to finish. “Whatever trends, whatever changes come,” Joseph affirmed, “Patterson will be there.”

Discover more about how practice management software can propel your business by visiting pattersondental.com/cp/software/dental-practice-management-software. ●

REFERENCE

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