



Dental Practice Management Software

A Practice Manager Assures Us That Positive Experiences are Possible.

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At Cellerant Consulting, we work closely with innovative companies that are bringing new products and services to the dental community. That provides us with a unique perspective on the technologies that are gaining traction in dental practices. One trend we've observed in 2020 is an accelerated interest in and movement to cloud-based software solutions, including dental practice management software.

I recently had the opportunity to talk with long-time practice manager Alison Muckenfuss about her experience converting to the cloud. Alison's history ranges from traditional on-premise systems to several successful implementations of the cloud-based system from Curve Dental.

Here are some excerpts from our conversation:

Q. Let's start with your background, Alison. Please tell me a little about the practices you've managed and the practice management systems you've encountered.

A. Prior to becoming a practice manager, I was a high school teacher. I came to the dental industry 20 years ago, somewhat by accident. While taking a break from teaching I found myself managing an established practice right out of the gate. They had traditional client server practice management software that was really an industry dinosaur, even at that time.

A few years later a former student of mine, who graduated from dental school, decided to start a new practice in Charleston, SC, where I live. He asked me to join his team and we built that practice from scratch with Curve Hero. I've used Curve ever since, including converting a second practice from Eaglesoft when our practice acquired them.

Q. Most of my conversations with dentists and their teams on the topic of practice management software solutions seem to center on their frustrations. I don't come across many raving fans. What has made your experience with Curve such a positive?

A. I remember early on, from the point we started the installation, telling the two doctors whose practice I was running that "Curve is a true business partner." The implementation team was very knowledgeable and ready to teach me what I needed to know. It was clear that they were there to help us use the software to its fullest potential.

Once we were live on Curve, I immediately got a greater sense of the tremendous amount of flexibility and customization that permeates the company and products. The Curve team was incredibly helpful and encouraging through the whole set up, implementation and training process.

Another thing that stood out was Curve's customer service. With my prior vendor, if I had trouble and called the support line it was like calling an insurance company. You wind up in an automated phone system only to be placed on hold for 30 to 45 minutes. Then when a live person does answer they might be able to resolve your problem. Or they might call you back in a couple of days when they can get around to whatever it was that you're calling about. At no point was any of that ever really a pleasant experience. With Curve it is completely different. When I called Curve customer service, I was talking to a human being in less than a minute! That human being knew Curve inside and out, and they knew dentistry inside and out. They were immediately walking me through whatever it was I had called about. Teaching me, showing me, demonstrating to me how to resolve the problem. Curve's customer service representatives are knowledgeable, patient, and pleasant. A wonderful refreshing change in the world of customer service.

Another thing that I love about Curve is the ease of product updates. With the other systems that I used, changes would be incorporated in the latest version, and we would have to basically shut down to do these upgrades ourselves. Anyone who has a cell phone knows what it's like to get the updates and then your phone doesn't work right after that. It was the same with our practice management software. We would launch the update, and it would be a nightmare because they were trying to pack all of these changes into what was supposed to be a single upgrade. With Curve, every week, every month, every quarter, I'd come in in the morning, log on, and I'd get a little pop up window that says "Hey, we did this while you were sleeping." It just works and it's something that is continual, logical, seamless, and very helpful.

Q. Alison, no matter how painful it may be to deal with the older technologies from legacy practice management companies, I hear a lot of anxiety about making a switch. Can you relate to the fear and offer any perspective to practices on getting past it?

A. Yes, I can certainly relate to the anxiety. It's scary to think about changing from something you know, even when you hate it. Even when it makes you crazy every day. It's a scary process. But with Curve, they have implementation down to a science. They have done so many data, file, and image conversions that it's going to be as smooth as it possibly can be because they are so good at what they do. The implementation team that is assigned to you when you are ready for that conversion is 5-star. They hold your hand, walking you through it step by step. Doing it patiently. Doing it knowledgeably.

I'm not going to say it's a day at Disney World going through a conversion. But with Curve, it's just as painless as it can be in the world of changing practice software.

Q. The practice owner or dentist is probably the ultimate decision maker in switching practice management systems in most cases. But I would think the team, and the practice manager in particular, would have a big voice in that decision as well. From the practice manager's perspective what might you say to the business owner or dentist?

A. In terms of having that conversation with the business owner or the dentist, I think the central advantage with Curve is efficiency. You can tell your dentist that you're going to save hours and hours every week, every month, versus traditional software that's out there. They are going to get as excited as I am, or as any office manager would be, over the ease and efficiency of things like billing, insurance, and patient engagement. From the very beginning the whole idea of being cloud-based was absolutely a plus and an incentive for us to choose Curve. When you really stop and think how advantageous it is to be able to log into your practice anywhere at any time and be right there able to do your job. It's just a no brainer to me.

The practices where I worked are on the East Coast. Every year we'll have a little hurricane skirt by, and the governor will tell us all to evacuate. And so right from the beginning, dealing with those situations was much more convenient. To be able to be at home, sitting on my couch with my laptop, and able to call the next day's patients to let them know what was happening and when we would be reopening again.

As another example, while we were starting our practice, the doctors had to work in other offices to put groceries on the table. If I had a patient in the office and the hygienists took an x-ray of their wisdom teeth, I could text message the doctor wherever he was and ask "Can you jump on the computer and look at this patient's x-rays? Tell me if you want to refer them to an oral surgeon or if that's something you want to do here in the office." They could log in, in less than a minute, look at those x-rays and give me an answer over the phone or via text. That convenience is unbelievably helpful in running your business.

Q. Compared to the general business and consumer sectors, dentistry seems to have been relatively slow to adopt the cloud for mission critical systems. At Cellerant we've noted increasing interest and what feels like greater adoption of cloud technology since the COVID crisis started in February. It feels like the tipping point for dentistry has been reached and cloud is finally coming into its own. What have you seen?

A. It's absolutely a trend. With practices closing {during COVID} and not having the traditional convenience of being there to see patients, the dental office team's eyes have really opened to the value of working from the cloud.

As an example, Curve's patient engagement suite was developed and launched well before this crazy pandemic that we're all living through. Fortunately, it allows patients to do their paperwork online so that you're not having them in your reception area and handling physical documents. All of that is managed electronically with Curve, so that it just eliminates a lot of those steps that you want to minimize in the current situation. Being able to stop by the office, pick up the mail, and then come home and sit down at a computer to post insurance payments, or reschedule hygiene from the COVID closings, has become essential.

It's just so easy to log in, to see your schedule, to see your patient's x-rays, to review treatment plans, and to do a little teledentistry over the phone using Curve. And now, it is especially important as dentists go back to work with all of the different protocols that we're having to institute into dentistry. The patient portal is a perfect example of that. It allows the patients to log into the portal anytime of the day or night, see their upcoming appointments, and check and pay their balances. Payments are made online without handling somebody's credit card or paper check. Curve really makes the whole idea of having a paperless office attainable.

So, with everything that has happened since February, I think that dentists and their staff really understand that we do need to make some changes. We need to do things differently than we have for the last 30 years. And Curve makes that easy.

Research:

<https://www.offthecusp.com/switching-software-systems-can-be-hard-3-ways-to-make-it-as-painless-as-possible/>

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