



The Future of TeleOrthodontics

The orthodontic profession lives amid a sea of innovation and change. We are at the beginning of a widespread movement in the way that we practice, and it begins with how we communicate with our patients. The practice of TeleOrthodontics is in its early stages, but its future looks very bright!

How's this for a bold prediction? In ten years, the use of the telephone and voice will be practically obsolete within the orthodontic profession. Many practices are now seeing millennial moms who do not want to call or talk to the office and would prefer texting over voice. These parents also want the fewest possible number of visits to the office.

So the big question for TeleHealth, in general, is how do we offer care for folks at a high level of quality and deliver that care without seeing them in the office? Today's patients think of their phones as extensions of themselves, so it's no wonder such a high percentage use technology to share health data, manage their preventive care, and book appointments.

This means that when the children of millennial parents are old enough to become orthodontic patients, they will expect the practice to offer TeleOrthodontics.

For the practice, TeleOrthodontics will pay off when it comes to attracting new patients. Acquiring patients today is very different from the past. Regarding millennials, we're talking about people age 28 to 34. There are approximately 80 million millennials in the US, which is the largest consumer group today. They prefer things to be easy. They prefer to do everything online, and they do not like talking on the phone.

You're going to need an online presence and the ability to acquire patients online. Among these patients, the biggest concern will be the cost of the treatment. The only way to give them an accurate fee upfront is to see their teeth, which you can get from pictures that they send you. From those pics—98% of the time—you'll be able to provide them a reasonably accurate fee.

Don't confuse an online evaluation with a full diagnosis. You can't tell if teeth need to be taken out, but you can quote a reasonably accurate fee and set up payment arrangements.

The fee, health history, and benefits are all known before the patient gets to the practice. Then, when they visit the practice, they can get everything they would've received in their second or third visit—including scans—done all at once. Mom can sign the paperwork as she already knows the fee. Mom and the patient will enter the exam room, and the doctor can go over the treatment plan. The patient knows they'll be getting the braces on that day.

Fixed-appliance patients learn that if they have a loose or broken wire or, perhaps, an o-ring came off, they can take a selfie and send it via SMS to the practice. Of these, 90% can be handled without an in-office visit; no need to take off from school. Parents will be relieved that all is well even without an extra visit. TeleOrthodontics can alleviate their worry. After all, they're spending a lot of money; they want to know that things are going to be okay.

At the same time, the practice doesn't have to squeeze in an extra visit; therefore, the practice saves \$30 to \$50 per visit. Think about it. Anytime a patient is seen at the practice; the staff have to glove, sterilize the chair, etc. By eliminating those unnecessary expenses, you've increased your bottom line.

Likewise, with aligner patients, the direct-to-consumer aligner products rely on TeleOrthodontics. They capture the market because they've made it easy to capture the patients online, requiring maybe only one office visit. For your first impressions, you'll go into one of their stores, or they'll send you an at-home self-impression package

Millennials don't want to take time off from work to go in and get their teeth aligned. In their view, they do not have "easy" access to a licensed orthodontist. If orthodontists can provide the same easy access as the direct-to-consumer aligner products, the patient would much prefer access to a skilled, licensed, professional orthodontist.

Using a TeleOrthodontic platform, orthodontists can provide care in 1 to 3 visits for the patient, which is quite acceptable to them. The orthodontist can see the pics of what the patient has sent. They can quote them a competitive fee. And they can deliver better care, but we have to let them know we offer this service.

TeleOrthodontics enables you to send aligners to the patients, so they don't have to come in. They can text and send pics of the aligners in and out or use one of several available appliance monitoring systems. The orthodontist guides the treatment from the practice. It's a more highly monitored treatment method. If a patient refuses to wear a removable retainer, the orthodontist can provide the patient with a fixed retainer, but direct-to-consumer brands cannot.

Being able to treat patients at home saves you \$30 to \$50 per visit when you offer TeleOrthodontics. If you see something that needs to be addressed, you can have them come in for an in-office visit. Your goal is to treat the vast majority of visits from home.

Finally, orthodontists can offer more virtual retainer checks after braces are off or aligner therapy is completed. You can monitor the teeth to be sure they're where you want them, converting the patents to non-office visits for 1 to 2 years.

Dr. Keith Dressler, a board-certified orthodontist and founder of Rhinogram, was extremely helpful in writing this paper, shared these facts regarding TeleOrthodontics in relationship to his practice:

"At the end of the day, my practice has increased incremental business by 30%. My overall expenses

have dropped 16%, and my net profit has increased by 45%. The other thing that's occurred is **everybody** in my practice has been given back 1 to 2 hours per day. The most exciting fact is that even though we all have more time, we've never been busier in our practice.

"TeleOrthodontics empowers patients to be able to text, make inquiries, set appointments, and fill out forms without an office visit. It also allows people to be honest. You can quote them a fee, and they can say to you, 'it's that expensive?' and not waste time having to come into the office. You save time because your staff isn't trying to chase them down. They don't want to talk to you, and they're never coming in.

"Those you can give a fee to, get to do a planned same day start. They don't miss the appointment. They're not a new patient no show. They're actually acquired by not coming in.

"Did you know, in 2007, texting usage surpassed voice call usage? That was the inflection point. Most now text with friends and family. That was much of the inspiration for Rhinogram. Rhinogram has taken down all the barriers. And with a website widget, patients can message your practice directly from Facebook.

"One final note: once you commit to TeleOrthodontics, you must promote it. In all your marketing materials, you must educate the public about the TeleOrthodontic services you're offering. Tell the current patients you have it.

"Our practice has a card to hand out to our patients that may not yet be using TeleOrthodontics, but it says, 'Save yourself a visit.' And it provides things they can do to avoid coming in. They are told they can do a virtual exam from their home. The key is to get everyone in the practice to preach the TeleOrthodontics message. You can also use TeleOrthodontics to create No Cost Advertising. Snap a pic of a patient and create an ad offering your telephone number and encourage prospective patients to text, call, or visit the practice. Then text it to the patient's Mom, asking her to share it on her social media page. They can share it from their phone. It's free, and you're reaching new patients—it's all about **acquisition!**"

Thank you to Dr. Keith Dressler, Board-Certified Orthodontist for 34 years and Founder for Rhinogram, the leader in TeleHealth communications



Dr. Dressler has over 33 years' experience in private orthodontic practice. He currently serves as the Chairman and CEO of Rhinogram. He is also on the advisory board of the American Teledentistry Association and an avid entrepreneur. In 2000, Dr. Dressler co-founded OrthoBanc, LLC a cloud-based automated accounts receivable platform, that is currently serving over 4000 healthcare providers and is doing over 450 million in sales annually. OrthoBanc made the Inc. 500/5000 list five-years in a row for being among the fastest growing private companies in the U.S. In 1998, Dr. Dressler co-founded Elite Physician Services, a national healthcare patient finance company. As CEO and chairman, Dr. Dressler grew the business to 200 million in sales before it became the Citi Health Card in 2003.