

How do I pay for a cone-beam system?

By James Jesse, DDS

During the past five years, the dental community has recognized and accepted that higher quality images generated by 3-D cone-beam systems allow dentists to better diagnose and plan treatments.

Three-dimensional CBCT imaging takes the guesswork out of dentistry. In fact, in many cases, cone-beam imaging is now the standard of care as noted in an article, "Cone Beam CT — Anatomic Assessment and Legal Issues: The New Standards of Care," in the September 2009 issue of the CDA Journal.

I have been using the NewTom cone-beam system at Loma Linda University Dental School for the past decade, and in May 2009, I purchased the PreXion 3-D CBCT system to replace my film-based pano. After evaluating every system on the market, I found the PreXion was a good fit for my practice because of its high quality images, its powerful yet intuitive software and the strong training and support system offered by the company.

As I have incorporated this important technology into my practice and

Here in Chicago

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into my lectures, the most frequently asked question I get from my colleagues is, "How do you pay for the system?"

No one questions the value of these incredible images, but they wonder how they can justify the cost of the purchase for a solo practitioner.

Until recently, the increase in dental implants and the need for more detailed, accurate information has driven purchases of cone-beam systems. I have found I am now using the system not only for implant planning, but also in every aspect of my practice, including surgical procedures, endo, perio and even restorative and general dentistry.

With the high-quality images, I am using my system to find MB2 canals that I could never see before. I can detect caries under amalgam that were difficult to find. 3-D images are a great tool for patient education.

There are many ways to answer the question, "How do I pay for

the system?" If you are sending out seven to 10 patients per month to a scanning center, it is time to start shopping. Some scans can be submitted for medical billing.

I have taken a different approach because I am using the system in every aspect of my practice every day. I now need the detailed information provided by a CBCT image. So, whenever radiographs are needed, my staff takes a CBCT scan, which also generates an accurate pano.

Since May, we have taken and billed more than 600 individual scans. You can do the math using your own billing amount for panos. In addition to the revenue generated by the scans, we are diagnosing and treating more problems that we would not have seen in the past.

From revenue generated from scans and our increase in treatments because of higher quality images and more accurate diagnosis, my accountant calculates that we will have paid for the system in two years. But the real value of a CBCT system is the ability it gives us to more accurately diagnose problems, providing our patients with a higher level of care. **■**



A digital periapical is taken to determine the cause of a patient's pain. The periapical does not clearly show the problem.



A CBCT scan is taken and clearly identifies the problem. (Photos/Daniel Eustaquio, DDS, Fremont, Calif.)