

Medical History Updates



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I have received several phone calls from colleagues regarding patient medical histories and how often they should be updated. It is a fundamental duty of the treating dentist to obtain an *accurate, complete, and current* medical history before treating a patient. Without this, you cannot adequately protect both the patient and yourself from unnecessary risks. When obtaining a patient's medical history, the first question to ask your patient is "When was the last time you had a complete physical exam conducted by your medical doctor?"

If it has been over three years since their last physical exam, it is *highly unlikely* the patient can provide you with an accurate medical history. Request they get a physical exam before starting treatment, especially if any high-risk procedures are anticipated. Also, if your assessment of the patient's health is contrary to what they may be indicating on their health history form (the patient is noticeably out of breath after a short walk from the waiting room to the operator, for example), request that the patient obtain clearance from their physician before you treat them.

Safe dentistry depends upon always having the most current information about your patient's health. Review their medical history each time you begin a course of treatment—especially if a patient has a complicated history. The more risk involved in the treatment, the deeper the inquiry into their current state of health should proceed.

Take the following steps at *every visit* preceding a course of treatment:

- Review with your patient their most current written medical history form in their chart, if available.
- Ask your patient, "Are there any changes in your medical history since your last visit to our office?"
- Check the patient's current dietary supplements.
- Ask the patient if, since their last visit, they have seen a medical doctor for any medical condition.
- Are there changes in their prescription medications—new or discontinued medicines or changes in dosage?
- Have they suffered any illness or injuries, particularly those requiring medical attention?
- Has their medical doctor informed them of any contraindications and/or precautions prior to receiving dental treatment?

Note any affirmative responses or changes in medication or supplement regimens in the patient's treatment notes. Do research regarding what if any influence these may have on a proposed course of treatment.

If there are changes they wish to advise you of, enter those changes in the treatment notes and mark the same on their current health history form—asking the patient to initial and date the changes. The treatment note entry might read like this; *Reviewed patient's current MH, patient advised no changes (or alternatively), patient advised of the following changes (list changes including new conditions, medications and/or new dosages of medications).*

It is our duty to obtain from the patient an accurate and complete medical history. Without it, you cannot adequately protect both the patient and you from unnecessary risks and potential harm.

Please call us at 844.223.9648 to discuss this or any other risk management concerns. This service is provided at no extra charge.

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