Reaching new practice heights with the cloud

The benefits of a cloud-based practice management solution backed by a strong support network are clear.
Dental practices thrive when the dentist and staff have excellent clinical skills and develop meaningful long-term patient relationships. Yet another layer of success entails managing efficiently, investing in software and adapting to unexpected events. The COVID-19 pandemic is a reminder to the dental profession that what goes on behind the scenes of a practice is just as important as what happens in the operatory and the reception area.

How can dentists and their team members ensure they can continue to manage patient records and communicate with patients, insurance vendors, labs and specialists even when they’re not in the physical space of the practice? Practice management and electronic health record (EHR) systems that reside in the cloud make it possible to run a dental practice from anywhere. Whether it’s reviewing a case from home over the weekend, sending an electronic prescription after hours, or managing billing and insurance claims during a practice shutdown, the cloud provides users with access to all the data and information they need to succeed.

What’s standing in the way of some practices making the transition to the cloud? What are the benefits of moving to the cloud? And when a dentist is ready to make the move, what questions should they ask themselves and potential cloud service providers?

### Barriers to cloud adoption

Many dentists have moved to cloud computing to secure patient and practice data and streamline workflows but others remain unsure about moving forward and question whether it’s right for their practices. Their concerns aren’t without merit. For example:

- **Networks and internet speed.** Practices that don’t have good internal networks won’t be able to support the traffic and high-definition files common with cloud applications. In addition, practices located in areas without high-speed internet access will struggle to use cloud solutions.

- **Cost.** Dentists may fear the costs associated with this transition, but if they evaluate their options they may discover IT savings. Some providers offer affordable subscriptions without high initial investment fees.

- **Control.** Giving control of practice data to a third party can make many dentists nervous. They wonder how secure the data will be, if it will meet regulatory requirements, and whether it will be corrupted or lost. Practices should always have a signed agreement with the third-party vendor before handing over control of their data.

### Cloud benefits

The benefits of moving practice management and EHR systems to the cloud are the mirror image of local storage. In addition to no equipment to install or store and no need for an employee or vendor to perform maintenance or backup tasks, the cloud offers these solutions:

- **Access.** Dentists and their teams can access data from anywhere they’re connected to the internet.

- **Adaptability.** As a practice changes—adds or reduces locations, changes their business model or adds mobile dentistry units—cloud technology can adapt and requires no additional equipment.

- **Data protection and restoration.** All reputable cloud solutions have robust data security and monitoring in place to ensure dental practices are compliant with all healthcare regulations. If computers in the office are damaged, no data will be lost when it’s stored in the cloud.

- **Efficiency.** Cloud solutions speed most back office tasks (including insurance eligibility and lab communication), provide real-time access to practice data, and perform upgrades more frequently without office downtime.

- **Positive patient perception.** Patients want their dental practice to be current with the latest technology. The cloud can add to that positive patient perception, which in turn can lead to positive word-of-mouth advertising and online reviews.

- **Team connection.** The cloud ensures practice team members stay easily connected across all processes and data in all locations.

### Analyze the situation

A practice that’s considering transitioning to a cloud computing solution should take a close look at how it’s currently managing its data. After the assessment is complete, the practice should seek out potential vendors and find the one that best meets the practice’s unique needs.
Every practice is different—there’s no one-size-fits-all solution—so the practice should ask some pretty pointed questions before making the final decision.

**Self-assessment.** Dental teams can start this investigative process by reviewing their current situation and asking some clarifying questions:

- *What’s the practice situation?* Is it single- or multi-location? How many patients does the practice see each month? What’s the rate of new patients? Has the practice been in existence for a while or is it new to the area? Does the practice’s future growth look to be rapid, steady or bumpy?

- *What’s the practice’s current workflow?* What currently works well and what’s become a challenge? What pain points would the practice like to solve?

- *How does the practice currently handle computing?* Do team members feel as though they spend too much time dealing with IT issues? Does the practice work with an outside vendor to handle IT? How is that relationship? How frequently do they have to be called in to fix problems?

- *What’s the hardware and internet situation?* Is computer hardware old or new? Does the practice have access to broadband or high-speed internet and is it reliable?

**Finding a cloud vendor.** Once a practice has a handle on its current practice and IT situation and feels confident that a transition to the cloud is the way to go, the next step is finding a solution that best meets its needs. A practice will want to ask these questions:

- *Does the vendor own the data?* If a practice contracts with a company and later decides to move to another vendor, does the practice own the data or does the cloud company?

- *How will data migrate to the cloud service?* How will the vendor move existing data from the practice’s current system onto the cloud? What does that look like? Is there any downtime associated with the migration? The practice should ask the vendor to provide examples, testimonials and referrals.

- *What will this service cost?* What is the practice getting for the base price? What are the monthly subscription fees? Are there any hidden fees? What are the costs associated with service upgrades?

- *What’s the learning curve?* Is the system intuitive and easy to learn or will staff require training? What kind of training is provided by the vendor? Will the practice have access to system experts who can troubleshoot user questions or challenges?

- *Will the system support existing third-party integrations and imaging devices?* If the answer is yes, the practice should ask how that works and whether those integrations will impact the learning curve. Will the practice’s current imaging devices be able to talk to the cloud solution?

- *How will my workflows be improved?* Get a demo. Review the software and make sure your current workflows will be improved and identify new ways the software can elevate your practice with simplified processes and improved patient interactions.

**The perfect solution**

A cloud service should provide practices with solutions to existing pain points. Whether it’s workflow challenges, communication barriers, or insurance and payment obstacles, the right cloud service will make dental teams feel confident that their highly sensitive patient information, clinical imaging, and treatment plans are safe and easy to access. At the same time, the service will alleviate the burdens of managing on-site storage, concerns about security, and limitations to data accessibility.

Discover Fuse, the modern, cloud-based practice management software from Patterson Dental. [Schedule a demo](https://www.pattersondental.com/fuse) or call 833.813.8433.