



Welcome to the green age

To successfully run an eco-friendly practice, the formalisation of green initiatives would not only help the environment, but patients and dentists too. By **Kerryn Ramsey**

There are many reasons for running an eco-friendly dental practice—everything from a desire to help the environment to overwhelming patient requests to simply saving money. In the past, installing an amalgam separator and adding a recycling bin was all you needed to call your business a green practice. However, with the increasing sophistication of clients, practitioners and suppliers, there are calls for a more formalised approach to green initiatives. A set of clear and achievable benchmarks regulated by an association would offer explicit guidelines to dentists and allow informed decisions by patients.

The Eco-Dentistry Association (EDA) is a US-based, international membership association supporting an environmental transformation in dentistry. They run the Green Dental Office Certification program (GreenDOC) which contains 180 initiatives that offices can undertake, earning points toward bronze, silver or gold certification. The program's initiatives address the physical space of the dental office, the dental processes and materials used, and ongoing practice administration and marketing.

“We are fortunate to have six Australian members, and three Australian practices that have either been certified or are going through the program,”

3 easy steps to going green

Handy tips for dentists from Ina Pockrass, co-founder of Eco-Dentistry Association...

1 Combine items sent to your office to reduce packaging and the carbon associated with transport.

2 Instead of tossing out old dental instruments, recycle them or donate them to an art program at a local school...after sterilising them, of course!

3 Rather than using bottled distilled water in your water lines, purchase a tabletop water distiller to reduce plastic waste and save money.

says Marcella Lentini, marketing and membership manager of EDA. “There has been an increase in enquiries from Australian dentists in the wake of the unprecedented recent heat-waves and heightened awareness from Australian consumers on sustainability and conservation.”

Dr Catherine-Anne Walsh of Sydney practice The Dentist at 70 Pitt St is currently working towards accreditation with the EDA. The practice was already run on green principles with an amalgam separator, biodegradable and carbon neutral products, a paperless office and the separation of all rubbish. They were doing everything they could think of that was eco-friendly but “we soon realised it would be a good idea to formalise the process”, says Dr Walsh.

says Ina Pockrass, EDA co-founder. “The only area that could benefit from regulation is the use of amalgam separators. The need to keep mercury-containing material out of our local waste-water systems is critical, and according to the US EPA, dental offices remain the number-one contributor of mercury to local waste water treatment facilities.”

A formalisation of clear green benchmarks would set the standard and create clear goals that a practice can work towards. Barbara Busina, of Atelier Busina, a Sydney-based architecture firm specialising in eco-friendly dental practice construction, says, “Benchmarks establish a common language, promote integrated thinking, recognise environmental leadership and raise awareness for the entire dental industry in Australia.”

In addition to this, dental practices—like households, offices and other businesses—can save money by being more sustainably intelligent. The Eco-Dentistry Association commissioned a study to assess the return on investment and cost benefits of running a green practice. “The study concluded that, contrary to belief that ‘green costs more’, the average dental office could improve its bottom line by as much as \$US50,000 per year by being green,” says Ina Pockrass who’s also been involved with the inaugural Green Dentistry Conference (www.ecodentistry.org/conference) on May 3-4 at Utah’s Sundance Resort. Speakers range from US-based green business coach Bill Roth to dentistry’s technology ‘evangelist’ Dr John Flucke and dental technology expert Dr Paul Feuerstein.

Quote

Architect Barbara Busina, Atelier Busina

“If you dispose of waste thoughtlessly, leave taps running, and have lights and air-conditioners on overnight, then the building is not sustainable. The way you use the building, run your business and create awareness makes all the difference to being eco-friendly.”

“I contacted the Eco-Dentistry Association in the US because, as far as I know, there is no Australian equivalent. We started going through its checklists and to be perfectly honest, it completely overwhelmed me.”

The GreenDOC leaves no stone unturned, covering everything from how you water your garden and the number of bicycle spaces available, to becoming a leader in green projects outside your business. “It really forces you to think outside the box and it shows how you can positively affect other people,” says Dr Walsh.

While the GreenDOC sets an incredibly high standard, the benchmarks are a totally voluntary set of guidelines. “We believe that dentists do best when their participation is voluntary,”

A big part of formalising green initiatives is the education of users and clients. “Sustainability is not a product—it’s an attitude, a way of living,” says Barbara Busina. “Even if you have the most sustainable building on the planet, you need to be engaged in the process. If you dispose of waste thoughtlessly, leave taps running, and have lights and air-conditioners on overnight, then the building is not sustainable. The way you use the building, run your business and create awareness makes all the difference to being eco-friendly.”

Perhaps one of the biggest misconceptions is that going green is incompatible with high technology. In fact, just the opposite is true. “We often say that the short definition of green dentistry is digital everything,” says Marcella Lentini.

THE GREENDOC CHECKLIST

outlines required standards and recommended initiatives within eight categories of eco-friendly dental practice.



Sustainable location

Waste reduction

Pollution prevention

Energy conservation

Water conservation

**Patient care, workplace policies
& community contribution**

Leadership

Innovation

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“Most hi-tech innovations are also the green choice. Take CAD-CAM systems—a hallmark of a hi-tech practice. Single-visit restorations reduce the carbon footprint of the office because the patient only has to make one trip, it avoids the waste associated with physical impressions (both the tray and the impression material), and it eliminates the carbon involved in transporting the restoration to and from a lab.”

Having clearly defined green benchmarks, a common code of practice and a formalisation of procedures would encourage the uptake of green dentistry. “I’m trying to run a business while doing the best I can for my staff and patients,” says Dr Walsh. “I don’t really have time to research eco-dentistry. However, if guidelines were introduced that clearly explain the cost/price benefit and the pros and cons of different options, I’m sure dentists and practice managers would be interested.”

As Busina points out, “Providing a green code of practice encourages dental clinics to positively approach eco-dentistry. It helps individual businesses work towards and maintain their sustainability goals and provides a form of recognition that can be passed onto the patient.” □