

## **Why has the hygienist fee increased?**

The decision to increase the hygienists' fee was not taken lightly. Due to the current pandemic, we have had to implement many changes to our service in order to make sure we eliminate any unnecessary risk of cross contamination between patients and practitioners. Those changes have left us with huge cost increases for the operation of the practice. An increase in PPE, the limited working hours to accommodate a new shift pattern for staff and other cost implications, go above and beyond what is reasonable to transfer to our patients.

Historically the hygienist appointments have been 20 minutes long. Unfortunately, in the current situation, 20 minutes is not sufficient for the hygienist to work in. After each patient, the comprehensive dental notes are written, the surgery is clinically cleaned, all dental instruments and equipment transferred to our central sterilisation room, the work surfaces have to be decontaminated thoroughly and finally the additional need to don with a new set of PPE (liquid replant gown and FFP3 mask) before the next patient is brought in. For this reason we have had to increase the hygienist appointment time from 20 min to 30 min. The extra 10 minutes are charged pro rata, therefore the hygienist fee has increased from £36 (20min) to £54 (30min). It is worth noting that patients are benefitting from extra time in the chair as a consequence.

Dental hygienist procedures creates aerosols, microscopic sphere of droplets, around the room. Once treatment is completed, the hygienist cannot return to that surgery for a period of one hour (this is called 'fallow time'). In order to comply with legislation to assure patients' safety, we had to allocate three surgeries for each hygienist. This would allow a steady appointment book where patients are booked with 30 minutes interval while allowing for one hour fallow time in each surgery after each patient. Adversely, this is not an ideal situation for the practice, as allocating three dental rooms per hygienist instead of allowing dentists to work in the extra surgeries has a reverberating effect on the whole practice. Due to these new working conditions, providing hygienist treatment is not financially viable for the practice.

However, as routine dental hygienist visits are a top priority for us and our patients, we have been very adamant not to pass on the real cost of providing hygienist treatment to our patients but have limited the transferred cost of £6 for PPE, thus absorbing the cost for fallow time entirely.

We hope this sheds light on the true extra charge we have made to our hygienist service during this difficult and uncertain time. If you have any further question, please do not hesitate to contact the practice for further clarification.