



OMG! Texting @ work is not gr8

By TDIC Risk Management Staff

Not many will debate the practicality of mobile phones. And since the ubiquitous gadgets are not likely to go away, it's essential to have a policy regarding smartphone and cellphone use on the job. It's equally important to document the policy in writing and make sure your team understands it.

Risk management analysts say many dental practice owners have not addressed smartphone use in a formal manner, but need to.

Mobile phone use during work hours can give patients the impression their dental care is not a priority, and phone use creates distractions that can increase liability. Inaccurate documentation and lack of attention to detail can occur when concentration is divided between work and mobile devices.

If employees are making personal calls, checking email, texting or using smartphone applications at work, the activities could be the result of a lack of policy or an unclear policy. If you have a mobile phone policy, review it for clarity and missing information. If you don't have a mobile phone policy, now is a good time to draft and implement one.

The Dentists Insurance Company recommends banning cellphone and smartphone use while on duty, including sending or receiving personal calls, emails and text messages or using smartphone applications. Further, TDIC recommends establishing a no-text policy, prohibiting staff from texting the dentist for any reason. This helps prevent issues such as sending a text instead of calling in sick for work. If the employee is texting about a patient, banning such communication also removes any potential violation of that patient's privacy.

According to Diana Ratcliff, an attorney in Southern California who specializes in employment labor law, one of the most important things an employer can do is make sure employees are fully aware of office policies and expectations on the job.

Ratcliff suggested that practice owners "communicate their expectations, have policy in writing and follow through with counseling if expectations are not met."

Talk to employees in a staff meeting about smartphone use and texting, and explain the rationale behind the policy, including liability issues that can occur from being distracted at work. Include the policies in your employee manual.

Additionally, encourage ethical behavior that keeps the interests of the practice and its patients first while dissuading behavior such as texting on the job. Model a high standard of personal conduct and do not use your own cellphone while on duty to make or receive personal calls, emails or text messages.

TDIC recommends the following regarding mobile phone policy, texting and employee communications:

- Prohibit cellphone and smartphone use while on duty for sending or receiving personal calls, emails or text messages, or using smartphone applications.
- Be clear that employees who need to use their personal phones may do so only during breaks or meal periods.
- Consider establishing a no-text policy, prohibiting staff from texting the dentist or office manager for any reason.
- Address attendance and specify that if employees are unable to report to work on time, they must notify the dentist or delegated staff by phone.
- Train employees on cellphone policy in a staff meeting.
- Provide employees a copy of the policy.
- Document cellphone, texting and attendance policies in your employee manual.

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