

It's Not Just You

by Janice Janssen, RDH, CFEE

It's gut wrenching... it's mind-boggling and it's downright baffling. I'm talking about misappropriation of funds in the dental office. I find myself shaking my head as a practice owner painfully explains another sad story to me. My heart breaks for that dentist and yet, almost every time I can anticipate the background and the ultimate conclusion of the story.



Each time I begin an investigation into a possible embezzlement I hear the doctor saying things like "I should have done this or that *"differently"* or *"I really trusted her/him"* or *"I can't believe this happened"*. This is something no one ever expects is going to happen...but it does, way too often. No matter how diligent the practice owner is, they can still be a victim of fraud. Although many people feel embarrassed or ashamed, it is really not necessary. Statistics tell us that it is happening to 60% of dental offices. Therefore, you are not alone.

I get asked all the time *"How do they do that?"*, *"How do they get away with it?"* The answer really varies case-by-case depending on the access the employee has in the practice and the controls that are in place (or out of place). Fraudsters are very resourceful; however, I will say that eventually most fraudsters will get caught. Some may take longer than others...but it will ultimately happen.

What can you do to protect yourself? There are several controls you can put in place in your practice to minimize your risk of fraud. Of course, nothing is foolproof; yet putting some simple controls in place will at least catch it sooner if it is happening. Why wouldn't you want to do that?

Here is my list of 5 things that you can do in your practice to help combat fraud:

1. **PASSWORDS** - I cannot emphasize this step enough. People will think twice about committing fraud if they are required to re enter their password to commit the crime. It also provides information if any transactions are questionable. You will know who to ask about the transactions as well as who made the change.

2. **PROTOCOLS** - Having protocols in place for items like petty cash, deleting transactions, taking deposits to the bank, reviewing daily transactions allow everyone to know that these things are being tracked.
3. **TRAINING** - There will never be a question as to how you expect the job to be done, if proper training takes place. I have completed several investigations that were not embezzlement or fraud...the team just didn't know what they needed to do. I find myself saying it all the time "You don't know what you don't know". If your team doesn't know the right way to complete a task they will do it the only way they know how. Get the training needed to ensure tasks are being completed properly.
4. **ACCOUNTABILITY** - Check your day sheets and deposits on a regular basis. Ask questions about transactions that you do not understand. This shows your team that you are taking an interest in your practice and that you are watching. Many offices tell me they have stopped running the reports, or giving them to the doctor, because the doctor never looks at them. It's your business...please look!
5. **LEAD BY EXAMPLE** - As the leader of your practice you must hold yourself to the highest standard. Everyone is watching you to see what is acceptable. Do not bend or stretch the truth. That is not OK in any situation and you want them to have the respect and integrity to uphold the standards that you expect in your practice.



I wish I had a nickel for every time I've been asked

"How do you stop someone from stealing?". I wouldn't say it's impossible, however, thieves get smarter all the time. They figure different ways and different schemes. They are constantly watching you, the practice owner. You should be watching them just as closely. If you have any inclination, don't hesitate to get it checked out. A simple investigation that merely determines that the team is in need of some training is money well spent. Of course, if it determines misappropriations, sooner is always better than later. Contact me if you have any questions: Janice@GTSgurus.com