



ORTHO2

# Keep Them Coming!

## Building a Rock Solid Observation Program

by **Natalie Beaton**

**W**hen I provide my free remote practice statistics report to offices, I am always surprised to find that many observation patients have simply slipped through the cracks or failed to schedule their next observation visit. I believe this problem occurs for two reasons: inconsistent follow up and a failure to build a strong sense of perceived value in these appointments. Having a strong and consistent observation follow-up protocol supported by the many Edge Cloud and ViewPoint observation tools and reports can ensure you don't lose sight of these incredibly valuable patients. In addition to careful follow up, I believe we set our observation program up for success or failure by how we educate parents about the value of these visits when we first discuss it at the NP exam. As a parent, I am not going to schedule consistently until I understand why that is so important.

In many offices, the most common reason that observation patients are not getting consistent follow up is that the status they are in is not marked as appointment required. This means if the patient fails to schedule an observation appointment or misses an appointment they DO NOT show up on the Needs Appointment List. I would recommend going into statuses and marking all your observation statuses as appointment required. (In Edge Cloud, go to Editor > General > Statuses. In ViewPoint, go to System Tables > Patient > Status).

Having clear statuses and recall procedures can support a good observation protocol as well. I generally see observation statuses and recall procedures falling into four categories but the phrasing for each type is different from office to office.

1. Observation Pretreatment (OBS) or Recall Observation (RCL)

These are patients that were seen for an exam and are not clinically ready to begin treatment. They are being seen for regular visits to evaluate dental growth and development.

2. Obs Ready (OR) or Recall Ready (RDY)

These are patients that when they were last seen for a recall observation appointment the orthodontist felt they would be ready to start treatment at their next visit. More time is scheduled at the next visit to update photos, X-rays, and diagnostic notes and allow time for financial discussion.

3. Obs Pre Ph 2 (PP2) or Obs Interim (INT) or Obs In Between (INB)

These are patients who have completed the active part of Phase 1 and they are being observed for any developing Phase 2 treatment needs.

4. Obs Phase 2 Ready (OR2) or Obs Interim Ready (IN2) or Phase 2 Ready (P2R)

These are patients in between Phase 1 and Phase 2 who when they were last seen the orthodontist felt they would probably be ready to discuss Phase 2 treatment needs and financials at the next visit.

Another place where you can lose your observation patients is in past due recall dates. Typically, there is good follow up for the first month or so, but after that the observation patients remain on past due dates and generally receive no further follow-up. To find these patients you simply need to run the Recall Observation report and set your first date further back in time. Sending a re-approach letter to these seriously past due observation patients can get more of them back into the schedule.

Having a clear observation follow-up cycle will prevent patients from getting into the situation of having a past due recall date that is more than three months past due.

Reprinted from

**The Newsletter for Members and Friends of Ortho2**  
April 2018 - Volume 36 Issue 2

The following is an example of how you might schedule the follow-up:

On the fifteenth of the month, send the following emails:

- Send a reminder email/text to all the observations for the first of the next month (e.g. send the email January 15 for February appointments).
- Send a reminder email/text for appointments that are due in the current month (e.g. send the email January 15 for all appointments due in January).
- Also send a reminder email/text for appointments missed in the previous month (e.g. send the emails January 15 for missed December observations).

In addition, send the following correspondences on the first of the month:

- Send a postcard or email for the current month's observations (e.g. on February 1 send the reminder for February appointments).
- Also send a first letter to the previous month's observation appointments (on February 1st send for January observations).
- Send a final letter that lets the patient know they are being put on 12-month observation due to lack of response to previous notices (on February 1, send last letter to December appointments). A copy of that letter should be sent to the family dentist so they know you have made numerous attempts to reach the responsible party to schedule the needed appointment. Change the recall date on these observation patients in Edge Cloud or ViewPoint forward one year. This will take them off the active observation list.
- One year later, send a re-approach letter (copy to family dentist), remove patient from Ortho2 recall observation list, and change status to ONR Obs No Response.

Once you have observation statuses that are marked appointment required and you have a follow-up system that addresses the patients that have failed to respond to your follow-up efforts, then you are ready for the second side of this

problem. Building the perceived value of the observation visit begins at the first visit with great scripting and written material that helps the parent understand the value and importance of regularly scheduling observation appointments.

Skip to page 3 of this PDF to see a handout that I use with my clients. This handout would be discussed and given at the first visit when the patient goes into observation program.

Having a kids club can also help build the child's perceived value of these visits and help get them excited about coming in. If you do have a kids club be sure to promote it extensively on your website, in your new patient welcome letter/email, in your new patient tour (having a bulletin board that explains the program can make this a lot of fun), and in a kids club handout given at the time of the new patient exam. Taking the time to promote the kids club at the first visit and on your website, sets the stage for a successful observation program until the patient is ready for orthodontic treatment.

I believe that the observation patient actually has a higher established value to a practice than a new patient. Too often, efforts seem to focus on bringing in new patients and we neglect the observation patients. Observation patients already have a relationship with the orthodontist, the staff, and the office itself. This makes it highly likely that they will start their orthodontic care with your practice when the time is right. With a strong, consistent, and personal follow up by the office and a clear understanding by the parents of the importance of these visits, these patients can be the base of your total practice success! 🍀

## About the Author



Natalie Beaton has more than 18 years of hands-on experience as a Treatment Coordinator and Financial Administrator. She works exclusively with Ortho2 clients to maximize their use of the ViewPoint and Edge Cloud systems in all critical practice areas.

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS  
ABOUT THE ORTHODONTIC OBSERVATION VISIT**



The following are some common questions and answers regarding this important pre-treatment observation stage.

---

**When should we schedule our next visit?**

My plan is to schedule regular orthodontic observation visits to monitor dental growth and development.

**What is the fee for the next visit?**

I provide these valuable checkups as a courtesy to you and your family dentist and there is no cost to you.

**Why are follow up visits important?**

These follow up visits allow me to monitor growth patterns and continue to evaluate whether orthodontic treatment will be necessary in the future.

**Should we come in even if there are still baby teeth that have not come out?**

There are cases where it is imperative to begin orthodontic treatment before the eruption of all permanent teeth. Regular observation means that any orthodontics, that might be needed, can be carefully timed to take advantage of specific growth and treatment needs.

**When will we discuss a treatment plan, treatment investment, insurance coverage, etc.?**

If or when orthodontic care is needed, any recommended orthodontic treatment will be fully discussed. Your orthodontic investment, various payment plan options and estimated insurance benefits will also be fully explained.

**What if I need financial information in advance for planning for the next tax year or for flexible spending purposes?**

Please let us know if a preliminary estimate would be helpful for your planning. In many cases your estimated orthodontic financial investment can be provided.

---

**THE TIME YOU SCHEDULE FOR A  
REGULAR ORTHODONTIC OBSERVATION VISIT  
IS THE BEST INVESTMENT YOU CAN MAKE IN YOUR CHILD'S SMILE!!**