

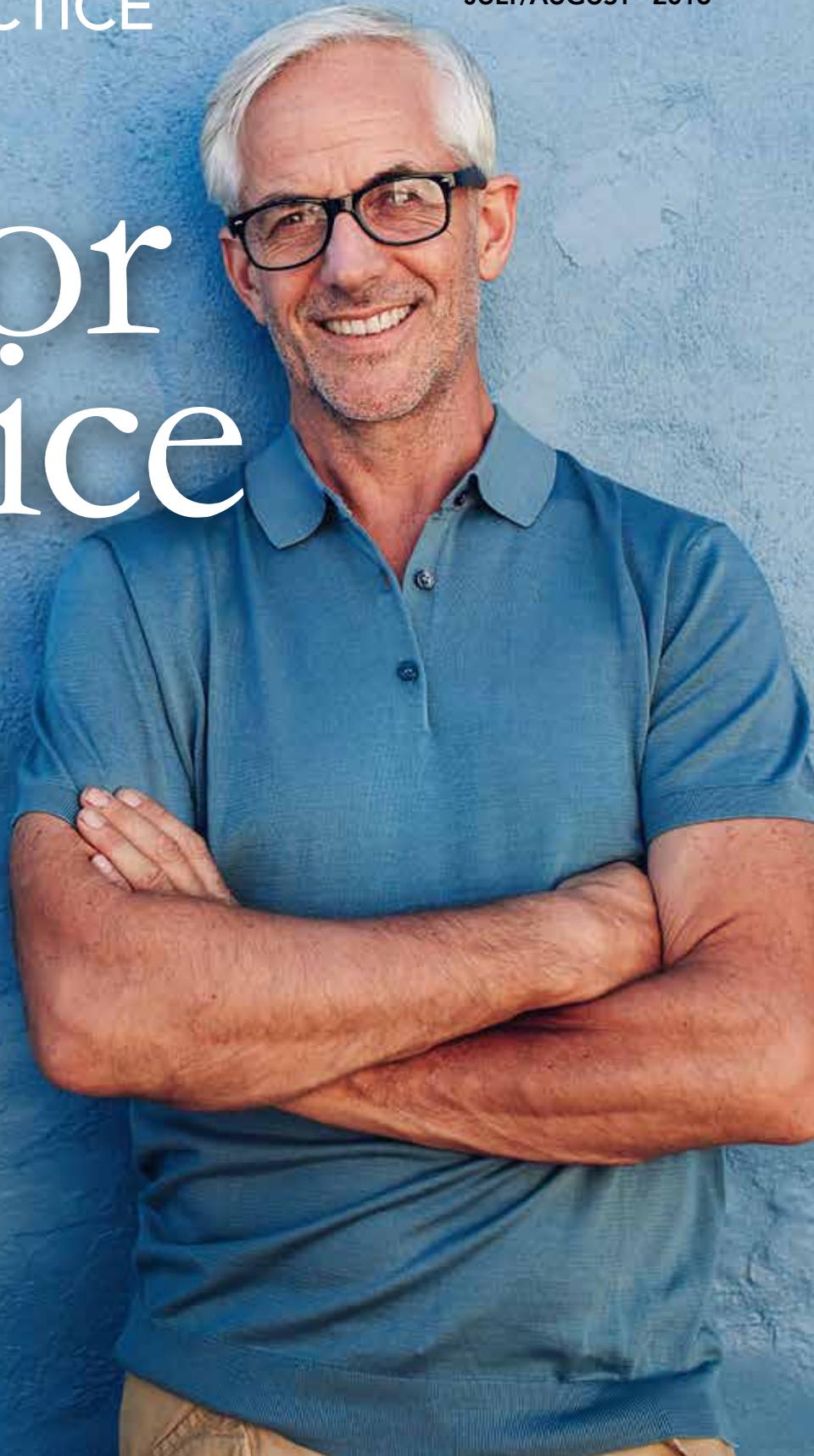
# EFFICIENCY

IN GROUP PRACTICE

JULY/AUGUST • 2016

## Senior Service

The country's aging population is changing the way dentists and hygienists must care for their patients.





# Window of Opportunity

Time is running out for dental groups to take advantage of federal subsidies



By Mike Uretz

Mike Uretz is a nationally-recognized dental software, IT, and Electronic Health Records (EHR) expert. He is the founder of DentalSoftwareAdvisor.com and DentalSoftwareCompare.com as well as the Dental EHR Editor for *Dental Products Report*. As a leading industry consultant and educator Uretz has helped group practices and DSOs evaluate and select vendors and solutions, structure and negotiate vendor contracts, and provide vendor management. He also has assisted practices with obtaining state subsidy payments through the EHR Incentive Program. Mike can be reached at [mikeu@dentalsoftwareadvisor.com](mailto:mikeu@dentalsoftwareadvisor.com) or 425-434-7102

Dental groups can ill afford to throw away millions of dollars in federal subsidies. Yet that is what's happening throughout the dental group industry. The reason is because many eligible dental groups are not aware of a rarely publicized subsidy program, which has been around for over five years and wildly popular in the medical industry, but has been the dental industry's best kept secret. The program has already distributed more than \$30 billion over the life of the program, but most of the incentive funds have gone to medical groups while dentistry has sat on the sidelines.

Known as the EHR Incentive Program, the purpose of this federally authorized and state managed financial incentive program is to provide rewards for groups that have purchased certified software systems and used them in a "meaningful way" to improve group efficiency and patient care and outcomes.

Having personally been involved with this program since its inception, I can tell you that, if eligible, a group practice would be crazy not to at least understand it better and see if they can take advantage of the incentive dollars available. Case in point, I am presently helping a few large groups that should receive over \$1 million each, and several other smaller groups that stand to receive hundreds of thousands of dollars while this is in effect. They have already received large initial checks from their respective state programs. This program equates to subsidies of \$63,750 for each eligible dentist in your group.

## Last year to apply

The problem is that if you haven't started the program by the end of 2016, it will be too late. This program started in 2011 and is winding down. But, it still is not too late to get in the game. Why wouldn't you take advantage of this program if your group is eligible? Your medical colleagues certainly have enjoyed receiving billions of incentive dollars over the past few years. Shouldn't you get a piece of the pie?

### **Is your group eligible?**

After having helped numerous groups obtain their incentive money, the first question I always get is how to know if they are eligible. It boils down to two main requirements you need to start with:

By the end of 2016, you must either purchase or already have certified dental software, or upgrade your present software to meet certified testing requirements. Many groups have come to me wanting to find out if their software is ONC ATCB certified. Be aware of vendors that tell you their software is certified when in fact it isn't. There are a lot of "smoke and mirrors" going around when it comes to this. Rules and requirements for vendors have changed over the years. So, buyer beware when determining if either your present software or software you wish to purchase is really certified.

By the end of 2016, you must either purchase or already have certified dental software, or upgrade your present software to meet certified testing requirements.

At least one dentist in your practice must have 30 percent or more Medicaid patient visits during one 90-day period in 2015. Some states will also allow you to substitute a 90-day period in 2016 as well. It still is possible to get the money for your group even if the dentist you hired in 2016 conducted the Medicaid visits at another group or practice.

### **Have you already received payment?**

If by some chance over the past few years you entered the program and received your Year One eligibility money already, there is a good chance you are leaving some additional payments totaling an additional \$42,500 per dentist on the table and not be aware of it. I've heard from some groups that had been successful in obtaining first-year payouts for the groups. But this is where things came to a halt. In several cases they weren't even aware they were eligible for additional monies. The good news is that if you are in this situation, it's not too late to apply for and obtain the additional money if you are still eligible. The rules and regulations for Years 2 – 6 are a bit different than Year One so different hoops to jump through but definitely worth going for it.

### **Should you consider a consultant?**

Having been involved with this subsidy program since its inception, I always get the question "Do I need a consultant to get this done?" I can tell you that jumping through federal and state regulatory hoops is not necessarily rocket science. However, if you've ever dealt with federal and/or state programs, you know it is very time-consuming with numerous stringent requirements and, as with any bureaucratic program, you can potentially get caught in an endless loop of additional support documentation and report requests from your perspective states. I recently spent many hours going back and forth with one state as they piled on requests for additional documentation to support our stated group volumes.

The bottom line is if you are willing to familiarize yourself with the rules, regulations and nuances of the program and have the time to spend it certainly is possible to take a stab at it (it will definitely be a learning experience). But, you also do have a day job and

might not have the time, knowledge, or expertise to devote to this. Also, this has to be done right the first time as more audits are being conducted on the tremendous amount of federal and state money being distributed. Finally, the urgency of getting this done by the end of the year in a timely manner should enter into your decision of going it yourself or hiring a consultant.

### **Don't miss the opportunity**

With the large amount of money available (your tax dollars by the way), if you are eligible for the incentive program, then it is foolish not to work as hard as you can to satisfy the requirements and receive the maximum amount available to your group. And don't forget, If you haven't entered the program by the end of 2016 then you're not eligible for any payments.

If you're interested in more information regarding more details of this program and how to get your money, please view this popular webinar at [www.dentalgroupsubsidy.com](http://www.dentalgroupsubsidy.com). ■