

## **EVOLUTION OF DENTAL PLANS**

When dental plans were first added to employer sponsored benefit programs the intention was to provide financial assistance for good, basic dental healthcare. The expectation was that costs would be higher initially but decline over time as the affects of the plan were realized. Plans typically provided for higher co-insurance for preventative and basic care--as much as 100%--and usually 50% or 60% for major and orthodontic dental services, with lower annual maximums than today.

Initially the dental community expressed concern about possible interference with the dentist and patient relationship. But by the early 1980s dentists became comfortable with dental plans and well educated on plan design. In fact, they appeared to use plans to maximize their income. For example, the frequency for which they recommended certain procedures such as routine cleanings began to match what was provided under dental plans.

As costs rose, plan sponsors began to increase frequency limits, reviewed the reasonableness of the number of services such as periodontal scaling limits, and make other minor adjustments that have not gone far enough to contain dental plan costs.