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Practice Management Articles



Dental Practice
 Management Solutions

Efficiency Metrics

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How does your practice fare when it comes to hygiene retention, filling your schedule and dealing with cancellations?

Help your practice operate at peak efficiency with 3 key components of your operations.

HYGIENE RETENTION: Ideally, at least 80 percent of your patients will attend their recommended hygiene visits. Do you know the current figure for your practice? It's common for many dentists not to be aware that their patient base is deteriorating at ever greater numbers and slipping through the cracks.

It's therefore crucial to let none of your patients leave without their next visit scheduled. That's no guarantee that they'll show up at the appointed time (more on that in a moment), but it's a vital first step. If fewer than 90 percent of your patients are departing without booking their next visit, you'll start to see that retention number sag.

SCHEDULING: One of the biggest challenges any practice faces is how to get away from merely "filling the white space" in the appointment book and instead engineering each day with an eye toward variety, reduced staff fatigue, good patient flow and consistent production.

The benefits of good scheduling are legion: It offers a road map for each subsequent day, week and month. You'll be able to see fewer patients yet do more dentistry per patient. It reduces stress, shows your patients you respect their time and even makes dealing with last-minute emergency care much easier.

First, set a production goal. Say your practice's financial need is \$50,000 a month and you wish to practice four days a week. That's \$3,125 a day. Add 25 percent to that (roughly \$800 in this case) to give yourself a cushion. That \$3,925 is your daily production goal. Then work with your staff to engineer 16 days a month to get you there. Doing so will help coordinate your scheduling and ensure you're not just randomly booking patients into oddball slots.

DOWNTIME: What happens, though, when patients cancel or just fail to show up? This is especially a problem in hygiene (which patients often skip because, after all, “it’s just a cleaning”), but it affects the whole practice.

Think of downtime as a percentage: the share of non-productive time your practice incurs each day. $\text{No-Shows} + \text{Cancellations} + \text{Open Time Slots} = \text{Non-Productive Hours}$. Thus, in a given month, if you have four hours of no-shows, five of cancellations and six of open units, 15 of your available 128 monthly hours (11.7 percent) are unproductive.

Some slack on the line is inevitable, of course. But ideally, no practice will go above 5 to 6 percent downtime in the restorative department, or 8 to 10 percent in hygiene. If you’re higher, you should try to reduce that figure by 1 percent a month. Sound difficult? It’s doable if you implement a cancellation policy of two business days; confirm appointments according to a patient’s preferred method; and don’t reward chronic scheduling abusers by offering next-day make-goods.

The patient is always right, of course. But it’s incumbent upon your patients to meet you halfway. You’ve got a business to run, after all — and these precision tactics will help you do exactly that.