

with dental technicians, and eliminate the need for messy and uncomfortable impressions. These and other services may require the purchase of new equipment or going to a seminar to learn new techniques, but expanding the range of services provided can attract new patients as well as allow the office to better serve current ones.

Providing Information Online

The practice website plays a vital role in marketing the dental office and provides new patients with their first impressions of the practice. All the information in the website should be current and meet the needs of the patients. It's vital to keep the website fresh and inviting.

Some features that can be added are the virtual communication features (online appointment scheduling and real-time chat, for example). These make the office available to patients at any hour and don't require the staff to monitor the site around the clock. Patients also like having a secure portal where they can view their accounts and pay outstanding balances. This can increase collections percentages and contribute to the impression that the practice is up-to-date and easy to access. Sites should also be mobile-friendly and HTTPS compliant so patients can access them from any device or on any network. Contact information and location should be prominently displayed to ensure patients and prospective patients are aware of this information.

Encouraging Online Reviews

Prospective patients may initially be interested in the dental practice because of what they've heard from friends or family, but online reviews play an important role in making connections with those who don't have such connections. In addition, online reviews can provide valuable feedback to the dentist

about his or her services. Patient testimonials on sites such as Google, Facebook, and Yelp can be increased by using a service that lets the practice automatically send post-appointment surveys to patients. When patients are asked about their opinions and feedback, positive comments are often elicited. Patients see that the dentist is willing to listen to their input and use the information to understand patient expectations. Dentists who capitalize on the opportunities online review offer and learn what is working and what isn't will continue to see growth in their practices. Patient turnover can be diminished, recall increased, and production expanded. The practice will also obtain a unique personality in the view of its patients and be seen as a patient-centric office.

Clinical Significance

Becoming a patient-centric dental practice can be a challenge but the benefits that are seen are well worth the efforts made. Patients want to come to a dentist who cares about their needs, provides special services such as payment plans and easy-to-access information, and structures the entire experience to make them comfortable. It's what will keep them coming back for their dental care and what they'll tell all their friends about.

Cooper N: Five strategies to build a patient-centric dental practice. *Inside Dent* 14:12, 14, 2019

Reprints not available

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Changes when times are hard



BACKGROUND

In most urban areas, dental offices are everywhere, so the level of competition can be significant. If your dental practice is having too many days when the schedule isn't full and you feel like each day you're struggling to cover expenses, it may be time to take a hard look at the practice and see what might be keeping you from growing.

DENTAL STAFF ISSUES

Everyone on the dental staff needs to be a team player. Ideally, your employees will be able to almost read each other's minds

and work in harmony. If staff members aren't getting along, communication is hampered—and the patients notice the tension.

If someone isn't being a team player, it's important to address the issue immediately. First, you should talk to the employee and issue a verbal warning. If things don't improve, a written warning should be given, and if no change results, it's time to dismiss that employee. Often the problem is a personality problem and no matter how many chances you give the employee, the situation just won't work long-term.

The bright side of the situation is that you now have the opportunity to bring in a new employee. Sometimes this person will have just the energy needed to enliven the entire office, which it will need if the tension with the former employee has been going on for very long. New employees can also offer new ideas, novel ways to do things, and possibly ways to save money that they've learned in other practices. New patients can also result, or previous ones may return now that the staffing situation has been resolved.

SUPPLIES

When the office isn't as busy, it's a good time to evaluate your relationship with labs, check out your supplies situation, and shift staff members if changes are needed. This may be the time to invest in a CAD/CAM machine that can reduce the number of crowns that must be sent to dental labs. This can be a way to save money.

Supplies, especially disposable ones, should be evaluated to see if less expensive versions exist. Things such as bibs and saliva ejectors are only used once, so buying more expensive ones can mean that you're literally throwing away good money.

When the person who orders your supplies simply picks up a catalog and places the order, it may be time to see if someone else might be better suited. Ideally, the person ordering supplies will also be looking to save money and would be willing to negotiate with a supplier to price-match what a competitor is offering. It can save a lot of money if the ordering is done by someone who is willing to research options and ensure that the practice is getting the best deal on their supplies.

PROCESSES

If too many patients are failing to schedule treatment, it may be time to rethink some of your processes. You may need to update your phone software or the way your practice handles phone calls. It may be time to have staff members ask for referrals from the patients they see. Every interaction needs to be studied to see what could be done better.

New practices may benefit from hiring a consultant who can observe the staff for a week and offer suggestions for how procedures could be improved. For established practices, the office manager or senior staff should know the elements of best practices, such as handling phone calls. You can also study the patient lists and see who's unscheduled, who's been sent predeterminations and needs a follow-up call, and where other touches are needed. Phone scripts may need to be developed to help in scheduling patients. You or your office manager may want to listen to recordings of calls to evaluate what is happening and determine the best way to improve the patient's experience.

THE OFFICE

Established practices might want to send the office manager out to the waiting room to look around as a patient would and discover if there are problems such as worn wallpaper, chipping paint, ripped upholstery, loose wires, or other signs of wear. Fresh eyes are needed to see these things; we look at the practice all the time and have become blinded to problems.

Improvements in the office decor can be readily addressed with a new coat of paint, clearing away of any clutter, and updating furniture and pictures. The result can be a dramatic improvement in the environment that patients will definitely notice.

Clinical Significance

Competition is constantly nipping at the heels of a dental practice located in an urban area. Patients benefit because they can pick and choose to go wherever they like the vibe or appreciate the friendliness of the staff. Dental practices need to do whatever they can to ensure that they're putting their best smile forward and making the patient's experience the most positive one possible.

Farran H: Hard times mean hard changes. *Dentaltown*, Nov 2018, pp 12, 14

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Key performance indicators



BACKGROUND

With the highly competitive ecosystem of dental practices, it's important to identify, track, and analyze metrics beyond the profit and loss statements and balance sheets to understand where a dental practice stands in a business sense. In addition to monthly or quarterly financial statements, practice owners

should obtain supplemental reports that outline the current state of the practice, how it compares to previous periods, and whether it's aligned with industry benchmarks (Table 1). This should all be compiled in a 1- or 2-page summary of the primary business statistics. How to approach this task in a general dental practice and an orthodontic practice was outlined.