RISK MANAGEMENT

Advice line for dentists

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BACKGROUND

The Dentists Insurance Company (TDIC) offers the Risk Management Advice Line as a complimentary service to help dentists handle difficult situations. Some callers are in the midst of a crisis; others just need reassurance that they've done the right thing.

CASE REPORT

A dentist called about a 36-year-old patient who required an examination and evaluation of her third molars. The dentist recommending pulling all 4 because their supereruption had created an anterior open bite after an occlusal guard was used. In the patient's medical history, she indicated she was taking magnesium supplements and had a history of benign ventricular contractions.

In light of these facts, the dentist consulted with the patient's physician before treatment. In addition, he held an informed consent discussion with the patient, who signed the consent form before any extractions were done.

Treatment was begun after the dentist checked the patient's vital signs. He used 5 carpules of mepivacaine, plain, and nitrous oxide. The extractions were considered simple and were accomplished with an elevator and extraction forceps. The treatment was accomplished without incident, and the patient was discharged with a pain medication prescription.

The dentist called later that evening, when the patient reported the extraction sites were still oozing. He made another call a few hours later and the bleeding had ceased. The next day, the patient's husband reported that the patient was snoring, but later had stopped breathing. Her husband had immediately called 911 and begun cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). The patient's cardiologist told the dentist that he did not believe the incident was related to the dental treatment.

ADVICE LINE CONSULTATION

The dentist called the Advice Line to voice his concerns. He was told that he followed proper protocol, but was also referred to an attorney to determine if he had to report the incident to the state dental board, which some states require. The attorney was able to reassure the dentist that such a report was not needed because the patient wasn't transported directly from the dental office to the hospital.

Clinical Significance

The dentist in this case did everything required and even beyond. Even in cases like this, something can happen, so it's better to be overly cautious than not cautious enough. The Advice Line not only provides answers for crisis situations but also provides confidential, one-on-one guidance on other issues. It's available at no cost to all members of the California Dental Association (CDA), American Dental Association (ADA), or any sponsoring dental association. Callers should ensure that they have the following:

- Policy number or first and last name if you're a TDIC policy holder
- ADA number if you're not a policy holder
- Patient chart if the call concerns a patient issue
- Employee file if the call concerns an employment issue
- Details on previous calls to the line if the issue is ongoing or recurring
- Correspondence and other documentation in case the analyst has further questions

IDIC Risk Management Staff: In doubt about how to handle a situation? Err on the side of caution. *CDA J* 46:519-520, 2018

Reprints not available

VALUE CHAIN

Assessing support and primary activities

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BACKGROUND

The concept of a "value chain" was first proposed in Michael Porter's book, *Competitive Advantage*. The process involves looking at the various links or tactics in the value chain individually, then assessing which processes and activities can be added, augmented, modified, or removed to create a more positive impact on the

business' bottom line. Dental practitioners usually focus on primary activities, such as marketing, inbound logistics, operations, and other logistics that happen before the patient even arrives at the office. Secondary or support activities can also impact practice margins and deserve an analysis and intentional management.

SUPPORT ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT

Human Resources

Usually dental practices consider human resources (HR) as payroll and benefits, but HR could be seen as a company resource to develop staff both at work and at home. Some of the activities that could be undertaken are investing in employee training or health programs. With support for their talent, employees may be more likely to perform their jobs better. If health programs are offered, fewer absences may occur. Analysis reveals that such activities can create value for the practice and minimize turnover, which is a positive result.

In addition, many companies offer career advancement and promotion. Dentists can offer individual growth, which prepares team members to contribute to a more elegant delivery of care. Intraoffice operational feedback loops and office culture can also see positive effects from HR investments.

Technology

The technology used in the office should be creating value for the practice but sometimes it's creating challenges. This can occur if the staff is not well trained in its use, if it needs to be updated, or if it simply doesn't fit the situation. Technology should make the practice run more smoothly and efficiently, but this can't be evaluated until the dentist understands the options available and sees how they fit with the office needs.

Procurement

Often dental practices cry that dental service organizations (DSOs) buy supplies at huge discounts and make it difficult to compete. Dentists need to realize that DSOs may receive better pricing based on benefits of scale, but they also have a better understanding of supply chains in their offices. Their inventory control systems operate economically and contribute just as much to their ability to compete. Most dental practices could lessen cost and waste by predicting business cycles and practice needs more accurately, which allows them to manage the supplies on hand and minimize or eliminate spoilage. The dentist needs to complete an inventory of what's on hand and track turnover rates for each item to determine what is overstocked and what is lacking.

PRIMARY ACTIVITIES MANAGEMENT

One primary activity that is critical to a dental practice's margins is service. In addition to following obvious customer service activities (such as calling patients after appointments, returning calls, and scheduling emergencies promptly), there can be other service-related activities that create value for the practice. Dental insurance is one of these services. It can create significant value, but the dentist and staff need to understand why the practice accepts dental insurance. The rationale should be identified and assessed for its addition of value to the practice. Both the dentist and the staff need to understand how and why this component fits into the practice's value chain.

Clinical Significance

Each aspect of the dental office can contribute to the success of the practice. Assessing each as a block that can create value or detract from value allows the dentist to identify areas that could be improved, changed, or eliminated so that a better bottom line can be achieved. The value chain concept can identify where and how each tactic fits into the practice and how it creates a benefit.

Rindler E: The "value chain." *Inside Dent* 14:14-16, June 2018

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WORK AND ILLNESS

Ethical choice regarding self-care

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BACKGROUND

What happens when the dentist develops the flu or another illness that compromises his or her abilities? Should the dentist call in sick? What is the dentist's ethical obligation to self-care?

ETHICS ANALYSIS

Dentists have a duty to maintain high ethical standards because their patients and staff trust them and because their activities should be aligned with the American Dental Association Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Responsibility (ADA