

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



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

Code). Dentists often take pride in being able to “soldier through” and set an example of efficiency, stamina, flexibility, and maintaining an ambitious schedule of activities. Such a demanding schedule can be fulfilling, rewarding, and engaging, but everyone has a limit. When the dentist's schedule is unremitting or too intense, it can be harmful to the individual's health and ability to perform dentistry.

One of the ethical principles that should be considered is the ethical requirement that the dentist be able to practice, which includes evaluating one's abilities to function while ill, taking medication, or sleep deprived, among other conditions. Dentists who are impaired in some way must limit the activities of their practice to areas where patients and staff aren't endangered. This is an example of “doing no harm.”

Another principle that should be considered is the veracity of the situation. Compromised dentists aren't portraying themselves accurately if they are ill while they are delivering care. If it becomes a situation where substandard care is delivered, the patient's and staff's trust and confidence in the practitioner can be forfeited. Legally, there may also be a violation of the state practice act in respect to how impairment is defined and addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dentists must set priorities in their lives. This includes taking care of themselves so they can function at near peak efficiency. Careful

maintenance is required, which may include exercise, recreational activities, creative endeavors, leisure time, or simply rest. Time away from the office can help the dentist remain sensitive to his or her inner self, where compassion and morality are harbored. Dentists need to recognize that they must devote time and attention to their own health. They spend each day asking patients to improve their self-care activities and should be willing to do the same.

Clinical Significance

Most patients would choose to reschedule care or be treated by an associate rather than risk receiving suboptimal care or being exposed to an illness. The ethical choice is to put the patient first and not risk intentionally exposing patients or staff to illness.

Kurkowski MA: Should I be calling in sick? *J Am Dent Assoc* 149:658-659, 2018

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