8 WAYS TO IMPROVE TIME MANAGEMENT

Provided by PracticeSense

IT'S EVERY DENTIST'S WORST NIGHTMARE: A SCHEDULE THAT HAS MORE HOLES IN IT THAN A MOLAR THAT'S SEEN TOO MANY SWEETS AND NOT ENOUGH BRUSHING.

Wearing multiple hats is the hallmark of private practices. Think about what you oversee in a single day.

- Obtaining previous patient records
- Obtaining accurate, updated patient information
- Obtaining patient consent to treatment
- Documenting patient visits
- Billing
- Scheduling of follow-up visits
- Taking, reviewing, and filing of X-rays or laboratory tests
- Collection costs if patients owe after insurance claims have been filed

That's quite a bit to accomplish in one day, but this list of things must take place with every patient. That means seeing only 10 patients could lead to hundreds of smaller tasks and processes. Unfortunately, a single problem in the course of these activities could destroy your schedule.

Practices need to have near-perfect time management skills to keep workload flowing smoothly. While some practices may feel their level of time management is adequate, any patient reschedules, gaps in the schedule, or unnecessary printing of patients' records could decimate your plans. If you don't think it's impacting your bottom line, consider two facts from our Time Management Survey.

80%

OF PRACTICES RESCHEDULE PATIENTS AT LEAST ONCE PER WEEK.

40%

PERCENT OF PRACTICES MUST TAKE TIME OUT OF THEIR DAY TO PHYSICALLY RETRIEVE PATIENT RECORDS.

These points highlight how practices may be suffering from poor time management. Even though these points do not necessarily revolve around time management, they result in changes to planned workdays and schedule. In other words, these major factors constrain your time management skills. The answer to the problem lies in developing better time management skills.

Practices can improve time management in several ways. Let's take a look at eight tried and tested ways of improving time management.

1 HOLD MORNING BRIEFS FOR WHAT NEEDS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED DAILY

Regardless of what needs to be accomplished today, your first priority should be getting your staff to work together. Hold a less-than-5-minute meeting each morning, and let your staff know what is planned for the day. This may include discussing the patient schedule, identifying last-minute cancellations, and assigning responsibility to try to fill those gaps.

2 FOCUS ON SCHEDULING FOLLOW-UPS ASAP

Patient follow-up visits should be scheduled as soon as possible. Even if patients ask for more time to schedule the follow-up, encourage patients to schedule the appointment immediately. Advise patients that changes to follow-up visits is allowed, but getting the appointment scheduled at the time of the office visit is the best way to plan for the future. Furthermore, most patients will stick with a scheduled follow-up visit time even when he or she plans on changing the time or date of the appointment with a call back to the office after leaving.

3 ASK FOR CONTACT INFORMATION FROM OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS, OR DIRECT TO THE OFFICE'S ONLINE REGISTRATION PORTAL

When a patient registers over-the-phone or in-person, try to obtain the contact information of at least two other family members. This will help staff members confirm appointments when patients do not answer at the primary contact number.

If patients' family members are also patients at your practice, you can ensure all paperwork is filled out accurately by checking information between records. However, your staff members need to ensure each patient has a HIPAA-compliant consent to discuss appointments on-file with your practice.

4 CREATE A TEXT MESSAGE OR EMAIL REMINDER LIST TO ENSURE PATIENTS ARE AWARE OF UPCOMING APPOINTMENTS

Confirming appointments by phone is obsolescent, and nearly everyone has a smartphone or tablet. Use an email or text messaging list to send out reminders for patient appointments. You can even request a read receipt to document that the patient has received and read the message. You may even ask patients to verify patient forms via your online portal. In our survey, 40 percent of practices reported not having a way for patients to access their information. In these cases, Practice Sense can help with enabling online patient registration as part of an email or text messaging reminder list.

5 CREATE A SHORT, DIGITAL LIST OF ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The age of the sticky note is on its out, but that doesn't mean your staff members do not need reminders. Create a digital list of activities and responsibilities for all staff members. You may keep this list on your in-office, secure server to allow staff members to share information. If you ensure sensitive, patient-identifying information is not included in this list, you may even consider a note-sharing service, such as Evernote, for this purpose.

Example Digital "To Do" List

- ☑ Get Mrs. Smith and Mr. Doe checked in at 13:00.
- ☑ Have Mrs. Smith and Mr. Doe verify registration information upon check-in.
- ☑ Send laboratory orders at 13:45.
- ☑ Follow up with laboratory status at 16:00.

The key to this list is keeping it in a digital format for updating throughout the day.

6 EVALUATE PERFORMANCE FREQUENTLY, AND DETERMINE AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Staff members cannot improve what they do not know. Evaluate their performance frequently, such as every Friday, and make recommendations on how to improve it. For example, staff members who have problems with getting patients to schedule follow-up visits should work on. Even if all staff members are doing well, consider holding a weekly or biweekly training session to review what else can be improved.

7 HAVE PATIENTS READY TO SEE THE DOCTOR UPON ARRIVAL TO THE PRACTICE

When the doctor knows more about what ails a patient before the visit, he or she will be able to determine the patient's problem and treatment faster. Traditionally, patients were asked for their symptoms at the time of the visit. However, the digital age allows practices to obtain this information at the time of registration. This is an excellent way to pre-screen for severe health problems, which can improve the flow of the patients as well.

8 KEEP THE SAME PATIENT SCHEDULE INFO AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE IN THE OFFICE

Obviously, some staff members may not need all of a patient's information in order to do their jobs. However, the patient schedule should contain the same information for all patients, and this same schedule should be available to all office members. If concerns about the severity of a patient exist, consider adding a highlight to the schedule to recognize these priority-cases. Additionally, this information should be based on information from patients' registration forms, which must maintain HIPAA-compliance. This is one of the best ways Practice Sense helps keep everyone in the office updated.

For example, highlight patients with complications from previous treatments in red to notify all staff members of the possibility of needing to have a patient come in sooner than expected. This creates a working knowledge of when an urgent or walk-in visit may occur.

WHAT'S NEXT?

If your practice has problems with time management or experience a high-volume of patient reschedules or cancels, you need to think about what you can do immediately. If you do not yet have a way for patients to register online, contact us at Practice Sense today. In the interim, print out the following page, and put it up throughout your office to let your staff know about your plans to work more efficiently and effectively.

HOW PRACTICE SENSE CAN SAVE YOU TIME.

One way Practice Sense can streamline your office is through a simple, elegant solution to paper intake forms. With PracticeSense, your patients can securely **complete patient forms before their initial visit**. To find out more how PracticeSense can save you time, visit us at practicesense.com and start a free trial.

We've noticed that patients that use PS to provide their information are more likely to sign up for treatment plans or receive additional services the same day of their appointment."

BEN Q.
PRACTICE MARKETING MANAGER

Attention: All Staff Members

We’re working to **improve office efficiency**, and this will largely be a team effort.

1. We will be conducting daily, 5-minute meetings to review what needs to be done and ensure patients are seen quickly.

2. All staff will work with patients to ensure contact information is updated at each step of the patient journey, including when vital signs are taken or otherwise assessing patients. We will begin bringing patients who have a scheduled appointment back immediately for vital signs unless a room is not available.

3. Everyone should start keeping a digital log of what you need to do today. Additionally, we will be creating a digital “To-Do” list for all office staff. This will ensure nothing is passed over.

4. Advise all patients that scheduling the next appointment is required at time of check-out. If a reschedule is likely, e.g. the patient plans to call back with a different day, highlight the field in yellow.

While this may create some “busy” work in terms of cleaning at the end of the day, we can see all of our patients faster, improving our performance and reducing our workload.

We want to make these changes as quickly as possible, and we need everyone to work together. Additionally, if you do not know how to navigate our patients’ online portal for registering or retrieving patient records, please advise the office manager, and we will schedule a training session for you as soon as possible.