

Review Article

Dental Business Management – A Key towards Success

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Abstract:

Dentistry as a profession is a way of providing needed dental services to the society and the dentist is the person who is the mediator for doing so. Over the years dentists have been just handling the dental procedures of our society but as the complexity of our society is increasing day by day the business aspects of dentistry are coming more in lime light and has become very important/crucial for even the survival of certain dental practices. Hence the dental practices must be managed as a business by the dentist himself to run his practice smoothly and continue providing dental services of our community. Key words: Dental business, Dental practice.

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Introduction

Business is as much a science as dentistry.¹ The management of a dental practice as a business has mostly been overlooked and many dental practices have turned out to be failures. As every dentist has a different way of practicing dentistry and different goals to achieve, there are certain models of management that are needed to be followed in order to achieve their goals. Practice management techniques are required to be followed by the new upcoming dentists as to succeed in their practices. Dental professionals mostly lack the knowledge of business management which is a set of skills need by the dental professionals to grow their practices and gain patients. Skills like leadership, teamwork, communication have become very necessary to survive in today's world. This article focuses on the management aspect of the dental practice and

some models of business which shall help the dentist to understand their vision for their practice and achieve their goals.

Objectives and Goals of a Practice

Being a dentist it's very important to believe that dentistry is a very satisfying profession and a way of providing good oral health for the community. Dental professionals need to cope up with today's uncertain economy and recession and for this there are certain objectives and goals that are essential to be followed for a practice to succeed. Creating a vision for the practice shall help the dentist to define where does he/she wants his/her practice to be after a period of three to five years and which part of the population he wants to target so as to gain more patients and improve his practice. To create a vision it is very important to share it with his staff and to make sure that everyone among them

understands it and supports it. Here is where communication skills between the dentist and the staff play an important role. Appreciation of the staff for their job done regularly is a very good way to motivate them and build up team cohesiveness. Financial goals of a practice are very necessary to be achieved. Although dentistry is a humanization business, meeting financial goals is the most important as it shall allow the dentist to develop a successful business. Another objective to establish a good practice is to develop precise and understandable documented systems to operate the practice and define how the practice is to operate day to day.

Hiring the right people is also an important objective of the dental practice as those candidates who understand the goals of the practice shall be fruitful for the practice to move forward. Yet another important aspect of the business management model is education of the staff members which needs to be continued on regular basis. Briefing and training of staff about the latest updates in dentistry and motivating them to attend many continuing professional development programmes shall help them to come up with new ideas for the progress of the practice and shall enable them to answer patients questions thoroughly and accurately. Lastly is the marketing plan model which is the most important of all as it is not only a mean of gaining new patients but is a way of increasing the recognition of the practice.

Leadership, Management & Team Work

Being the principal dentist of the practice do you only involve in treating patients or only running the business or a bit of both! To make the most of the practice it is very important to have many activities which require several people to execute them perfectly. In doing so the team requires a leader to lead them with a clear vision through the basic and complicated processes to be carried out in day to day practice. The

dentist himself has to focus on being a manager, a leader and a dentist of his practice. As a manager the dentist has to plan, organize and coordinate and as a leader he has to inspire and motivate his staff. Leadership and management should go hand in hand, not only to maximize the efficiency of the staff but to mature their skills, develop talent and inspire results. Good management skills shall help to become a good leader and all these together will help to become a good manager and create a stronger and better team. Respecting the staff and believing in them, appreciating their work regularly will help to build up team cohesiveness and a stronger team, as a strong team is required to run a good dental practice and it takes a good manager to direct the team and a good leader to build the team and teamwork required.

Patient Management

One of the most important goals of an upcoming dental practice is to establish an effective appointment control system. There is no one simple way of scheduling a dental practice that works for everyone. Managing appointments of the practice is an "art" which is unique to every practitioner. The methods and manners used for making appointments a decade ago have become a history in the 21st century. In today's world, appointments can be made by the access of website and various mobile applications. Patients do not need to make phone calls or wait in long queues before being treated. The ease of access with the software's available has brought a revolution in the appointment systems in medical and dental practices. Once an initial appointment is made and the patient has visited the practitioner the future appointments can be made by the staff of the practice at their workstation. The day to day operation of a dental practice requires an effective method of planning the appointment schedule of patients in order to run the practice smoothly, and for an effective scheduling system the cooperation

and team work of the entire dental team is necessary.

Communication & Customer Service Skills

Excellent communication has become an integrated part of any job profile in today's world. Understanding the basis of good communication should be an absolute must for an oral health care providers and his team. Interacting with people is a key part of an oral health care between professionals within the dental team, public and especially patients. Wright² has suggested 10 skills for effective communication.

- Build rapport with patients.
- Encourage patients to take an active role in their dental care.
- Listen effectively to patient.
- Respond effectively to patients questions.
- Explain their dental condition and treatment needs in detail.
- Manage financial discussions.
- Communicate effectively with other team members.
- Convincing patients to accept their treatment recommendations.
- Speak to patients with confidence and assertiveness.
- Resolve conflicts within team members.

The continuing dental education programmes for the dental team should also focus on modules of conflict management and customer service which shall help them to enhance the communication skills and manage patients more effectively.

Every employee of the dental practice should "*Master*" certain customer service skills which shall help the practice to avoid any embarrassing customer service related issues and lose patients by letting them down. Customer service is about more than being nice to patients. Some specific skills to provide great customer service to patients are patience, attentiveness, clear communication, positive language, body language, time management, goal oriented focus, persuasion skills and willingness to learn. Customer

service has become an important part of every business. In today's global economy the world has become smaller and homogenized with dental practices becoming more and more similar. People are getting more options to pick and choose their dentists. In such conditions a dental practice can still stand out amongst other practices by providing outstanding customer services and building up great personal relationships with their patients.

Conclusion

There was a time when dentistry was a piecework profession where the dentist used to just get paid for drilling and filling but in today's competitive world more of management skills are necessary to manage and establish a successful practice to control the use of money, time and other resources making the dentist the person incharge of all the business affairs of his practice. There are many business models in today's world but to adopt a particular model or system is a very important decision to be made. For such decisions it is necessary to understand the economic changes, governmental mandate, law and ethics of the dental profession and many other factors. Lastly the dental professional must make a move into the new world of globalization with new skills and values for his team members, at whatever level they may operate as without all the team working together effectively and efficiently for each other and providing excellent patient services no practice can achieve its goal to be successful.

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