The quest for excellence - business as usual?

By Fiona Stuart-Wilson

Most people coming or running a practice like to think that they are providing excellence in their clinical care any justifiably proud of what they do. However in today's increasingly competitive environment in which we deliver dentistry to an increasingly discerning and critical population, it is happy to exercise its right of choice, clinical excellence and efficiency are no longer enough. Excellence has to be a thread through all of the management and operational activities of the practice. It also has to involve the embracing of change. Excellence is not about maintaining the status quo and carrying on with business as usual. In today's environment, change, environment, doing that could mean that you are running your practice slowly into the ground.

Any quest for excellence needs a leader and as the owner or manager of the practice you are in the position to make changes and set the strategic direction and plan towards excellence. In theory this sounds great but putting this into practice can be more difficult. There are several practical steps you need to take, do, but if you do what you do that is important but also the way that you do it.

First you need to think about exactly what you are trying to achieve and develop a very clear image as to what the successful practice you are striving for actually looks like and feels like to work in. A surprisingly large number of practice owners do not give this great consideration. You could start by thinking about what ideally you would like patients to say about your practice if they were talking to other people about it. That done, you must then crystallise this picture into meaningful, measurable and realistic goals across the key business areas of your dental business.

Next you need to tell your staff and others who work with you what these goals are. You also need to be enthusiastic about them so that they are expecting them to follow your lead and work at explaining your goals in a motivating and compelling way. It is important for your team to be really clear about what successful looks like for you. They will be delivering your ideas.

Now you can start to examine the systems and procedures you have in place for achieving your goals – not as the case may be. You may have had these systems for some time. They were designed to get you where you are now, and not necessarily to where you want to be, so they may need to be changed or updated. It does not mean they are wrong or inherently bad. It simply means that the world has moved on and we and our systems need to move with it. Take each aspect in turn. Ask yourself the following questions for example:

- The experience of your patients from the moment they contact the practice compared to your idea of what should be happening?
- Does the staff have the right attitude?
- How effective is your marketing strategy at attracting the right patients for the practice you want to have?
- Are you investing in the right equipment and technology to attract those patients?
- Are you charging the right fees to allow you to reinvest in having examined systems you need to prepare and get on with your plan to make changes.

This is about demonstrating that you are leading the change. You have to demonstrate integrity, enthusiasm and commitment in order for your staff to trust you enough to help you achieve your aims. Things may of course change and you will need to learn from the mistakes we make. However, your commitment, enthusiasm and integrity will communicate itself to your team and encourage them to achieve these objectives, overcoming obstacles that arise and bring your vision to life.

This does not of course mean you should be doing everything yourself. You should encourage others, help them to be creative in their thinking as a team and individually about how things can be done. Above all as a good leader you will be a role model, and demonstrate in yourself the characteristics that you want your staff to display. So if you want your team to be committed, motivated and passionate about what they do, you need to be just as committed, motivated and passionate. Good leaders also notice contributions, and make sure to ensure everyone feels appreciated and included in the quest for excellence.

All of this involves hard work. It almost certainly involves stepping out of our comfort zone. Real excellence means that we ourselves must also be willing to change and see and do things differently. Thinking of new, better, different, more efficient, more effective ways of doing things that are already working is part of that commitment to excellence just as much as rectifying things that are going well less.

For many years people in the profession talked about the management 'side' of dentistry. Some still do. Yet the truth is that there is no management 'side'. You cannot be a good dental practice if you are not managing. This does not of course mean that you have to work in. A surprisingly large number of practice owners do not give this great consideration. They have a much easier time than dentists. The reason is they have a desire and want for the salon service.

This is what you need to create with the patients in your practice. You need to educate the patient on hygiene care, on preventive dentistry; and create desire, want and value for the service.

Getting tough is not enough. You've got to discover—and try to eliminate—the reasons why patients skip appointments.

For many practices, missed appointments are like a perpetual flu—always keeping them under the weather.

Sure, some no-shows are inevitable, and if only 4% of your appointments are broken (an accepted average) you're not suffering much. But it's unusual for practices to experience skip rates of 10, 20, or 50%. That's on top of cancelled appointments.

You can fill some empty slots with walk-in and same-day appointments, but probably not all of them, and such substitutes usually won't generate as much revenue as regular visits. One way to study these factors into account and estimated that no shows deprived clinics of 14% of anticipated revenue.

No-shows isn't just a money sapper. It wastes the time of staffers who prepare for appointments, deprivies patients of needed care, and exposes you to a malpractice risk if an untreated condition worsens. Some doctors have taken the draconian step of writing letters reminding patients to check with their husbands to see if they're okay. (Do you have a policy about the amount spent in our area)?

Perhaps you've even had a patient, regarding your appointment with you so they could make their hair appointment! So why is it that hairdressers have a much easier time than dentists? The reason is they have a desire and want for the salon service.

What topics do you wish to share with our readers?

A successful dental business requires a management/leadership team that takes a hands-on role in the day-to-day operations of the practice. What topics do you want to share with our readers? Some of the topics that the Board of Advisory Editors have identified include:

- The risky business of dentistry
- Art of persuasion - How to get to a YES
- Managing Performance in your Clinic
- Giving your Practice a Competitive Edge

Enjoy reading.

Fiona Stuart-Wilson is a dental business consultant, trainer and author who has extensively worked with practices in the UK and internationally.

UMD Professional Ltd

Fiona Stuart-Wilson
Dental Business Manager
eniko@drduhai.com

With passion for dental practice management

By Dental Tribune MEA

Dental Tribune MEA: Ms. Eniko Simon recently arrived in Dubai with a lot of passion and plans in Dental Practice Management.

Ms. Eniko Simon: The passion for Dental Practice Management began in 2008 when I started to work with dental practices in the UK. After working with many practices, I was able to extend my knowledge and continue to study dental business management with UMD Professional in London which helped me to grow and evolve in the profession. I have been fortunate enough to implement my knowledge and passion in the Middle East by working with Dental Practice in Dubai since 2010.

What is the Role of Dental Practice Management?

In today’s dental practices and industry, we now realize that dental professionals who have invested in their own businesses are becoming more aware of the importance of gaining management knowledge and of employing an experienced Practice Manager to help them run and grow a successful, efficient dental business that meets and exceeds the needs of their patients.

How a dental business is managed and led is a vital differentiator. These activities can create sustainable uniqueness for a dental practice.

Practice Managers are essential members of the modern day clinical team - in order to help dental professionals create a highly efficient, successful practice by making sure the business operates at its best capacity. With an effective Practice Manager in place, dental clinics have the proper ingredient to become a high performing dental business.

Why Middle East?

With the growing number of Practice Managers in the region, the aim of this Dental Practice Management Supplement is to provide interesting, relevant and thought-provoking articles and ideas on the various ways dental businesses are operated, managed and grown over time.
Diagnose the problem: Who is the problem.

Many doctors have avoided emergency three days out, you risk missing it. Nothing could be worse.

Many practices use the SMS which ensures that the patient receives the message even if busy or at work. Then they generate a report for the practice.

When you shop for new practice management software, your office already includes your billing and scheduling software rather than having someone write a new interface. Your current system may even have a phone reminder tool built in.

Good practice management programs also can generate written reminders that you mail. These may be better for elderly patients who might forget a phone call. For your computer-savvy patients, consider e-mail reminders.

Ideally, every scheduled patient should receive a reminder. A short message saying that their appointment is scheduled and will take place the following day. Face it—nobody really wants to be reminded.

Whatever system you deploy, issue reminders at least two days in advance. Two days gives you enough time to plug in a new patient. Your ability to improve, though, depends on maintaining a list of scheduled patients who might like to be seen sooner.

Address the emotional and mental components

An auto-cancellation system alone won’t prevent no-shows. You also need good communication skills.

After all, research has uncovered emotional barriers to keeping appointments. Patients may worry that a treatment or procedure will be uncomfortable, or that they’ll hear bad news. By taking time to learn about your patient’s fears, you can help them overcome the hump.

Likewise, patients with chronic cases often underestimate the importance of follow-up visits because their doctor merely told them, “I’ll see you in three months.” That’s not enough. You need to explain the consequences of their case and the require-

ments, personally I agree with this procedure, but there are gentler cures that go to the heart of the problem.

Dentists_customers agree with them personally I agree with them personally. However, this does nothing to curb the problem, and it creates other instances, as days with fewer no-shows than expected, the doctor will fall behind.

What’s worse, longer wait times in the office due to the unpreparedness of the patient, and even more so to encourage no-shows. Research suggests that patients who have to wait more are less likely to keep their dental appointments.

To get serious about fixing the no-show problem, first diagnose the causes. For example, the longer the wait for a dental appointment, the greater the chance of a patient missing it.

Forgetfulness, too, is a leading cause. No-show patients tend to arrive late.

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A high-tech reminder system may even have a phone reminder tool built in. Your current system may even have a phone reminder tool built in.

To get a picture of what’s happening in your practice, check all no-shows over the past three months. Produce a table with columns for patient gender, age, insurance status (if applicable), day of the week the appointment was made for, morning or afternoon appointment, new or established patient, area of residence, and physician—any variable you’d like to explore. You may also notice that most no-shows are new visits in the afternoon, or occur with a cold, unexpected doctor in the group, or on Thursdays.

Export your table to a spreadsheet and graph the results. Your computer-savvy patients, consider e-mail reminders.

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