Managing Time

What is done, cannot be undone

‘time and tide wait for no man’

when in the chronicle of wasted time... (Shakespeare sonnet)

‘The abbreviation of time, and the failure of hope, will always cry with a braver shade the evening of life.’

(Edward Gibbon, English historian)

‘The moving finger writes, and having writ, Moves on: not all thy piety nor wit Shall have it back to cancel half a line, nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.’

(The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam: Edward Fitzgerald)

What message does all of this have for you and your practice? Your dental practice is your business, and like any company, you must be able to measure your performance to ensure profitability. You must be aware of the changes that are taking place in your market. You must be able to see if your products and services are meeting the needs of your patients. You must be able to measure the productivity of your staff.

Consider the following list of time wasters in practice:

1. Failed and cancelled appointments
2. Having to redo dental work
3. Inadequately trained staff
4. Pausing tooth preparation to by suction or rinsing
5. Misplacing laboratory work; mistilling x-rays and files
6. Defective equipment breakage during clinical procedures by phone-calls etc; having to de-glove' re-double, during clinical procedures
7. Spending more time than necessary for perfec tion when good is good enough.
8. Spending less time than you think is necessary for perfor tion when good is bad enough.
9. Getting interrupted during clinical procedures by phone-calls etc; having to de-glove' re-double, during clinical procedures

Each of these statements would contribute to inefficien cy, together, to frustration, loss of earnings, annoyed patients, and less interpersonal relationships. Just think who gets stressed when you run 15 min utes late; your patient; the next patient in the waiting room; your nurse, your receptionist, and not least, you! Time managem ent is a necessary skill to be learned and applied, and be gins with a considered and system atic analysis of one’s daily activities. That said, it is worth employing someone to sit in your surgery with a stop-watch and note-pad and observe and measure your daily routine.

However, this is only a starting point, for what you will be quantifying is the percentage of your time you are using inefficiently. Stephen Covey defines ‘efficiency’ as getting more done in less time. However, doing more is not necessar ily doing better. To do better is to become more effective, and this should be your goal. One way of becoming more effec tive is to prioritise your time, and scrap what’s unnessa ry. Just think: improving your time by 20 per cent is equivalent to working one day less per week, having a day off to play golf, or read or spend with your family. This creates a better balance among the various roles in your life... not worth striving for?

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The Sceptic presents

The case for... and against...

Improving your practice will make it more appealing, but there are many pitfalls. Ed Bonner weighs up the pros and cons

Most dentists spend eight hours in a week.

The 10th Dimension

The power of 10...

...a series of articles by Dr Ed Bonner BDS MDent, Sloan Fellow London Business School, practice development consultant & coach

Creating a space

There are few professions more confining or restrictive in a physical sense than dentistry. Most dentists spend eight hours a day, five days a week in a cell. Why then would you not want that cell to be as perfect as you can make it, with design, equipment, lighting, air exchange and general ambiance all functionally and aesthetically optimal? Why would you want to subject your back, neck, and eyes to more strain than is necessary?

A question of pride

What about your self-esteem? And that of your employees? How do you feel your patients feel about your place of work? A place to be tolerated (or worse, endured), or one to be praised at Saturday night dinner? Your surgery and reception room are your shop front, your ‘come hither’ showpiece, an essential part of your extended being. To be seen as less than excellent is to be less than excellent, and you pay a price for that, perhaps greater than the price you would pay to be seen as the best. There is a very simple test: how do you feel when you walk to and through your front door? The answer is anything less than ‘great’, you are selling yourself and your profession short. That aforementioned cell will be no more welcoming than a prison cell, and you will feel just as imprisoned.

On the other hand, walking into a newly-created or refurbished, functionally designed, state-of-the-art practice can lift your spirits, improve your output, increase your earnings, protect your body, reduce your staff turnover and please your patients. Which of those would you not wish to have, whatever the cost?

The hidden costs

Time management is an essential skill needed in any profession. What you do, and the way you do it, will significantly contribute to your success or failure. If time management is simply a question of priority, for what you will be quantifying is the percentage of your time you are using inefficiently. Stephen Covey defines ‘efficiency’ as getting more done in less time. However, doing more is not necessarily doing better. To do better is to become more effective, and this should be your goal. One way of becoming more effective is to prioritise your time, and scrap what’s unnecessary. Just think: improving your time by 20 per cent is equivalent to working one day less per week, having a day off to play golf, or read or spend with your family. This creates a better balance among the various roles in your life... not worth striving for?

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