Why Practice Management?

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Historically, dentistry has been a closely regulated field in terms of management, marketing and business ethics. Dentists were educated to achieve one goal—clinical excellence. The notion of marketing a clinic, selling services or even discussing ideal business models and profitability simply were not (and in the majority of Universities, is still not) part of the curriculum, as some dentists felt these concepts somehow detracted from the professionalism of the industry. As a dentist, I understand and appreciate that some dentists find a focus on dental management, marketing or business efficiency to be contrary to achieving clinical excellence. However, in today’s world, I believe clinical excellence and an efficiently operated business only complement rather than contradict one another.

Practice management and quality of patient care

One point of view to consider is that failing to operate a clinic efficiently or not consistently providing outstanding customer service can detract from a dentist’s ability to provide excellent clinical care and a positive patient experience. A clinic that is disorganized or chaotic, for example, does not provide excellent clinical care and can detract from a dentist’s ability to provide outstanding customer service. 

For excellence in dentistry, the goal is to have systems in place to provide comprehensive diagnosis and treatment to all patients, as well as effective care for overall excellence in oral health treatment. 

What these examples also indicate is that efficient management systems and follow-up procedures allow practices to track and interact better with patients, ultimately providing these patients with the opportunity for excellence in dentistry. The goal of efficient dental management is to help dentists and their staffs achieve their personal and professional goals by providing a solid business foundation from which to grow. This does not detract from, but rather enhances, clinical care.

But, does implementing Practice Management make us focus only on profits and the money side of our business? Or does it mean we focus only on money at the expense of the very patients that are our primary focus? "I believe clinical excellence and an efficiently operated business only complement rather than contradict one another."

Balancing quality care and ethics

In no way am I suggesting that a total focus on money at the expense of the best interests of patients is the proper way to practice dentistry. Practice management is a very broad field that covers hundreds of different subjects, and only one of these is practice profitability. A comprehensive practice management program must consider the enjoyment of the dentist, satisfaction and training of the staff, level of stress in the clinic, proper care of emergency patients, patient financial arrangements, treatment, presentation and case acceptance, technology investments, continuing education and more. But those who lump critical practice management issues into one category and proclaim they detract from clinical care rather than enhance it misunderstand the very purpose of better practice management excellence in all areas of the practice.

Efficient practice management cannot be accomplished without gaining the overwhelming satisfaction and trust of every patient. This can be achieved only through excellence of care and by achieving the high professional standards that dentistry currently demands.