

THE GUIDE TO START A DENTAL PRACTICE- NARRATIVE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Practice is an organization that allows an authorized individual to offer specific services under one roof while management refers to the execution of planned services. This being the case, dental practice management is the service delivered by the dentist in a clinical set-up. The most important step before starting a dental practice is to set up goals and objectives. Even if the clinic's proprietor is technically proficient, it's possible that initially, he or she lacks sufficient practice vision. Asking another dentist's advice is a smart move rather than trying to open a clinic on your own. Good manners is an additional character that is required by staffs to the patients. Infrastructure has as a significant impact on staff morale, productivity, and patient perceptions of a practice. Dental clinic should be set up according to the Harmonized Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier Free Environment for People with Disability and Elderly People. Fixed, variable and overhead costs should be supervised often. Creating a specific website increases the visibility of clinic. Files of the patients can be arranged by the patient's name, location or any other sequence to avail it as and when required. The guidelines for running a successful clinic is to become aware of yourself, recognize the patient, recognize the work, and apply what you've learned.

KEYWORDS: Cost, Dentists, Group practice, Insurance, Practice management, Social media.

INTRODUCTION

A dental practice is considered successful when there is a proper allocation of resources, proficient skills to treat the patients, comradeship with the nearby resident dentists and general population. The patients frequently visit a clinic for bleeding gums, dental caries, tooth pain, and aesthetic concerns. The patient satisfied with the treatment pays for the service provided either partly or in full in accordance to public or private sector. The word "practice" refers to an organization or a contract that allows an authorized individual to offer specific services under one roof. Management means execution of the planned services in an effective way. This being the case, dental practice management is the services delivered by the dental manpower in a clinical set-up.^[1]

DEFINITION

Practice management can be defined as the organization, administration, and direction of a professional practice in a style that facilitates quality client care, efficient use of time and personnel, reduced stress to staff and financial profitability.^[2]

TYPES OF DENTAL PRACTICE

a. Independent solo practice

It's a type of practice, in which most of the job is done by the dentist himself. The professional task of a dentist may be assisted by the dental auxiliaries.

b. Group practice

In a group/ non- solo practice, the dentists works with at least one other dentist. A contract is made between the dentists to run the clinic and fulfil the required treatment.^[3]

Classification of group practice

→*Dentist owned and operated group practice:* A group of dentists practice at a single site or multiple sites. The clinics will be organized by the grouped dentists as a partnership or professional corporation.

→*Dental management organization affiliated group practice:* An agreement is made between dentist/ group of dentists and dental management organization to carry out the business activities.

→*Insurer provided group practice:* The group of dentists in a particular dental organization insures an enrolled population and provides necessary health care services.

→*Not for profit group practice*: It's a group practice where dentists treat patients as a part of generosity and helpfulness, especially to the disadvantaged people who are in need.

→*Government agency group practice*: The group of dentists function under a government agency. They are treated as government employees and work according to the rules and regulations of the government agency.

→*Hybrid group practice*: This type of group practice is a combination of the characteristics mentioned above.

c. Solo with facility sharing/ Partnership

All the dental equipment's, dental auxiliaries and the dental clinic set up are common for two or more dentists; who yet run their individual practices.^[4]

DENTISTRY AS A BUSINESS

The personnel title of the staffs varies from one dental clinic to the other. In general, who takes the responsibility of business in the dental office is called as the administrator. To make the business profitable, the administrator should have the skills in digital technology and creative ideas to increase productivity. He or she needs to utilize the dental clinic's important asset, the "dental patients," as effectively as possible.

ESTABLISHING DENTAL PRACTICE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The most important step before starting a dental practice is to set up goals and objectives. If not done, the success of attaining the target will be questionable.

Steps to frame objectives

→*Develop a set of values*: To become a successful dentist it is essential to retain certain values such as patient care, priority to health and safety, business management and proper utilization of dental auxiliaries and other staffs.

→*Plan and implement the objectives*: Main objectives should focus on how to raise the productivity and patient flow to the clinics. The dentist should have an adequate knowledge on advance dental technologies and keep him updated to attract the public. Once the objectives are set, subsequently it becomes a rule of the dental office.

→*Make a mission statement*: An organization's business, goals, and plan of action are outlined in its mission statement. The staffs must be trained to implement the mission into dental practice.

For instance:

- Treat patients with respect
- Give value to the patient's feelings
- Charge minimal fees for the treatment and gain a reasonable financial return
- Maintain a state of harmony and peace among the employed staffs

- Dentists need to be highly skilled technical individuals who motivate their patients and treat them with loyalty
- Encourage the process of a dental office that complies with state dental laws and operates smoothly and efficiently.

→*Create principles*: Develop business principles in the dental office. Here, the dentist provides a numerical description of the methods and steps involved in the administration of business activities related to the budget process.

→*Develop customs*: The dentist must establish a custom to improve the quality standard that stipulates both the staff's expected performance level and his or her personal performance level. It is important to confirm on a regular basis that the practice standards are being followed.

→*Acknowledge the staffs*: The most valuable resource a dentist may have in their clinic is their personnel. The pay scale offered to the staffs should be satisfactory which in turn increases their enthusiasm towards work.^[5]

STEPS TO COMMENCE A DENTAL PRACTICE

a. Create a business and financial plan

This will help to raise money, grow tactically and retains the business in right pathway. Once the business plan is set, the dentist can look at the financial arrangements. The financial plan ought to comprise the payment of staffs, utilities, maintenance, overhead expenses and advertisements.

b. Finalize the location

Setting up a dental office requires consideration of the location, just like any other business. The following points to be considered:

- Choose the target location
- Know the population density in the area
- Have a look at the neighborhood zone and colleagues of the clinic. Decide whether the clinic will be attracted by them or not
- Determine the dental supply companies
- Find out if there is a good market for prospective workers

c. Get a guide/figure out network of dentists nearby

Though owner of the clinic have good technical skills, at first he/she might not have adequate vision in setting up a practice. Rather than putting efforts alone to set a clinic, it's a wise decision to take advice from another dentist. The experienced one will guide in sharing some of the probable difficulties one faces as a new practice is set up.

d. Set up your website and profile in social media

Create a specific website for the clinic that includes:

- The clinic & specialist name with designation
- Highlighting few words about the clinic
- Contact no, email id

- Address with significant landmarks
- Services provided
- Facility to book appointments online
- Eye-catching snaps of the reception and clinic
- Clinic timings

The easy way to reach people nowadays is via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc. Create a profile to advertise the clinic. Post images/ videos of the patient before and after treatment to get more views. This is one of the most cost effective marketing strategy. For ethical reasons, make sure to get the patients' consent prior posting their images on social media. Be cautious not to add any irrelevant information.

e. Employ staffs

Hiring competent employees that you do not need to train is essential to your chances of success. For eg: the person who takes the responsibility of the business office/ reception should know to handle the financial aspects. The clinical area should be employed with trained and specialized dentist. The dental hygienist ought to be well-educated and not a non-dental professional.

f. Get insurance

The novice healthcare professional must locate a reliable insurance representative who can elucidate the many insurance policies required for the practice.

Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII): It is an insurance coverage designed specifically for professionals, such as doctors, attorneys, chartered accountants, etc., to protect them against responsibility arising from negligence while providing their professional services. The insurance companies not only pay the other party's compensation but also set up the legal representation of advocates when they collude with other parties for financial advantage.

g. Become apparent

Participating in state, national, international dental association increases the visibility of the dentist and the clinic.

h. Pay attention to the patients

A possible source of referrals is the patients themselves. As a result, pay attention to what the patients are saying, get to know their family, and show interest in their requirements.

i. Review and modify the business plan

Business plan doesn't last for the whole career. It keeps changing from time to time. So it is necessary to modify the business plan on regular basis and make the required alterations.^[6]

DENTAL CLINIC DECORUM

Good manners is an essential character to be followed by each staffs among each other as well as to the patients. It

should be practiced as a daily routine, not only when the patients are around. It might be detrimental if polite behaviour is not encouraged amongst one another. If decorum is not maintained and a poor relationship continues, action has to be taken to alter their behaviour for a successful dental practice.

Workplace bullying in the dental office environment should be avoided. For eg:

- Gossiping
- Exposing patients' confidentiality
- Humiliating someone repeatedly
- Watching or nit-picking to excess.^[7]

DENTAL OFFICE DESIGN AND EQUIPMENT PLACEMENT

a. Infrastructure

Color has a significant impact on staff morale, productivity, and patient perceptions of a practice. It is one of the best way to attract the patients. Light and dark colors can be used alternatively based on the geographical location. Moreover, the staffs' efficiency steadily improves if there exists a pleasant environment. An untidy dental office creates a doubt of mistrust to the patients. First impression is always the best impression. The initial sight of the patient in dental clinic is the reception area. People are not interested to wait in congested area. Hence, the reception area should be spacious with adequate number of seats. The theme of the dental clinic should be replicated in this area. The reception room's lighting, woodwork, ceiling height, and color scheme should all be chosen to create the right atmosphere for the patient's visit. Specific facilities like desks, electrical connections for laptops will ease the students and working class people during long appointments.

- The receptionist seat should face the entrance to welcome the patients
- Desk tables should be at an adequate height to meet the patient needs
- In the reception area, patients view should be hidden to see the clinic clock
- Compared to vertical files, lateral or open files that are 18 inches deep take up less space. These files come with two to five drawers and are available in widths of 30, 36, and 42 inches.
- Paper and materials must have room in the cupboard for storage.
- Every workstation should have a phone, and wherever feasible, it should be hands-free.

b. Design

The three main sectors in the dental office is the reception, working area and an intra communication area. Consider the three sectors as a triangle. Measure the distance from the center of the reception to the center of the communications area and to the center of the working area. The perimeter of the triangle should not surpass 26

feet. If this is planned accordingly, the entire work in the dental office takes place without any disturbances.

c. Position of the dental chair

Most preferable way to position a dental chair is to face an open window. This comforts the patient, make them less phobic to a closed space, and reduces anxiety. Make sure to have enough space for the dentist while reclining a dental chair, especially when there is a narrow space.^[8]

d. Dental care clinic for special need patients

The following items ought to be placed in a dental clinic, according the Harmonized Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier Free Environment for People with Disability and Elderly People (Government of India Ministry of Urban Development, 2016).

- Parking space should be within 98 feet from the clinic
- The pavement should be smooth and levelled without any obstacles for walking and wheeling
- For visually impaired patients , pathway should have dot type or tactile pavers to guide them while walking
- Ramp- Width about 47 inches, vertical rise greater than 6 inches with handrails
- Staircase- In one flight run, no more than twelve risers.
- For wheelchair patients, the door should have a horizontal handle
- Restroom should have a western closet.^[9]

HANDLING FINANCE

Diverse dental practices adhere to distinct ideologies concerning the timing and mode of patient payment requests. The patient may pay with credit cards, checks, or cash. They may or may not file insurance claims on their behalf. The patient has already paid the practice in full, thus if insurance is submitted, the insurance company is required to reimburse the patient directly. Obviously, the dentist office's cash-only system reduces bookkeeping significantly. The phrase "Inform before you perform" is applicable to the dental office's account administration. First, inform everything clearly to the patients including the treatment charges. Then, the patient should agree to pay the charges without any influence of the dentists. Finally, the agreement should be reported in a written document. Fixed, variable and overhead costs should be supervised often. Fixed costs such as rent, utilities and salary of the employees does not depend on flow of the patients whereas variable costs such as lab tests is a vice versa. Any cost that is not related to the income of the clinic is overhead costs. The most common overhead cost in a clinic is rent, office supplies, equipment, marketing and employee salary.

How to overcome overhead cost

- The flow of patients and staffs requirements should be in a proper ratio. Terminate employees on time if there is no longer a need for them.

- Dentists should make use of offers free of cost, receiving credit for suppliers, and haggling over lower rates with their suppliers.
- Buy reasonable yet high quality products for treatment, while spending least for noncritical items
- Local labs also provide quality prosthesis, compared to international labs at minimum price. Identify such labs for more profit.
- Owners should also devote their overhead marketing to regular patients than patients with missed appointment.^[10]

PATIENT DENTAL RECORD STORAGE

Files of the patients can be arranged by their names alphabetically from A to Z. While using electronic record, files are arranged in terms of their street, state, city despite their names. Each new patient or account is assigned a number as part of the numerical filing system. A numerical file system can be very helpful in bigger clinics with admittance to computers since it process the numerical data more quickly than alphabets. The alphabetical organization of papers based on their subject or topic is known as the subject filing system. It could be applied to the filing of accounts payable receipts: Several smaller folders organized by firm may be kept in a large file folder. Chronological filing system is arranging according to date. It is used as a subset in numerical, alphabetical, subject, or geographic order by placing the most recently arrived patient at the front of the file folder.^[11]

REGISTRATION

- Clinical Establishment Act Registration
- State Dental Council Registration
- AERB clearance- Atomic Energy Regulatory Board
- Biomedical waste management from pollution control board
- Provide safety guidelines for facilities falling under its jurisdiction in the fields of industrial, radiation, and nuclear safety.
- Register the clinic for GST, service tax, and tax withheld at source using a PAN card.
- State Fire Department's NOC, if relevant
Observe the provisions of
- State Acts like Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940
- Pharmacy Act, 1948
- Environmental Protection Act, 1986
- Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act, 1954
- Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities and Full Participation) Act, 1995.^[12]

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR DENTAL CLINICAL ESTABLISHMENTS^[13]

Space for one dental chair	Total Area	100 sq feet
Common area	Reception, toilets	35 sq feet
Working area	Dental chair + washing area+ bio medical waste	60 sq feet carpet area/ one dental chair
	Sterilization area	30% of carpet area/ one dental chair

For each added chair, extra 50% of the space is required

CONCLUSION

The guidelines for running a successful clinic is to become aware of yourself, recognize the patient, recognize the work, and apply what you've learned. In every communication with a patient, make sure to acknowledge their expressed beliefs and values as well as the reason behind the treatment.

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