

Dental Practice Management

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Abstract

Dental care, as part of the specialized outpatient care, is essential in ensuring the overall health of the population.

Private dental practices in Romania require personnel specialized in dental management. Success in dentistry depends, on the one hand, on the management of clinical aspects, and equally on the efficient management of the dental practice.

Patient satisfaction is influenced by factors related to the communication between the physician and the patient, technical competence and by the environment provided by dental practice.

The realization of the paper followed a review of specialty literature, through which the main aspects of dental office management have been analyzed, rendering the management solutions available to all of those interested from an economic, deontological point of view, as well as methods of managing human resources in order to obtain the best feedback possible from patients.

Keywords: management, marketing, feedback

J.E.L. classification: M1

1. Introduction

The profession of dentist aims to ensure public health and the individual's health through activities of prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases and anomalies of the mouth, teeth and jaws and of adjacent tissues, carried out in compliance with the Dentist's Code of Ethics (Colegiul Medicilor Dentisti din Romania, 2013). Dental health care, as a part of specialized outpatient care, plays an essential role in ensuring the overall health of the population (Gobjila and Galbur, 2013). The dental services market experienced a spectacular development, having a positive impact on service quality and in the implementation of state of the art technologies in the private sector in this field (Gobjila and Galbur, 2013).

Very few medics have thorough management knowledge, which sooner or later leads to a chaotic activity in the office. This paper offers solutions represented by creating and documenting step-by-step management and marketing systems. This way, the medic can delegate all of the non-medical activities.

2. Exercising the dentist profession

In accordance with Government Ordinance no. 124/1998, republished, on the organization and operation of medical practices, the medical practice is the means of exercising the medical profession, being an organization with or without legal status, providing public, state-owned or private preventive, curative, recovery and emergency services (Colegiul Medicilor Dentisti din Romania, 2013).

The profession of dentist as a liberal profession may be exercised within the medical practice in one of the following forms:

- Individual medical practice – where the dentist exercises his/her profession, being able to have as employees or collaborators doctors or any other categories of personnel (Colegiul Medicilor Dentisti din Romania, 2013).
- Grouped medical practices – several individual offices, which have created joint economic facilities but retain their individuality in relations with third parties (Colegiul Medicilor Dentisti din Romania, 2013).
- Associated medical practices – Several medical practices which associated with each other for the purpose of carrying the activity jointly and providing patients with access to comprehensive medical services. Doctors who are part of associated practices retain their individual rights and responsibilities (Colegiul Medicilor Dentisti din Romania, 2013).
- Medical civil company – consisting of two or more associated doctors, which may have as employees or collaborators doctors or any other category of staff (Colegiul Medicilor Dentisti din Romania, 2013).

In Romania, approximately 11,000 dental practices are registered.

Private dental practices in Romania require personnel specialized in dental management to ensure a smooth running of the clinic not only in terms of the quality of dental treatment. It is important for the doctor to focus on achieving an efficient medical act, while the administrative burdens cannot be ignored.

3. Results and discussions

Success in dentistry depends, on the one hand, on the management of clinical aspects, but equally on the efficient administration of the dental practice. The two categories of issues must be equally managed equivalent, because dentists tend to focus on only one category, ignoring the other.

The Romanian Society for Dental Ergonomics (RSDE) conducted the study “Current practices in ergonomics, prevention and management in dentistry”, which is part of the project “Ergonomics, Prevention and Performant Management in Dental Medicine by adopting European Standards”. According to the study, dentists turn to specialists for drafting legal documents. The survey results indicate that 79% of respondents felt that the management of the practice increases its efficiency and 63% that it ensures a continuous development of the business (Mediafax, 2011).

The past years have brought to attention a constant concern of marketing companies in terms of identifying and defining the objectives necessary for the transformation of a dental practice into a profitable business, these being *efficiency* and *productivity*. The activity of a dental practice must be coordinated in all its aspects, from the most basic, such as doctor-patient communication, to the most complex, related to marketing strategies and human resources development.

As with any other business, efficient cost and profit management is essential in assuring success. For dentists, understanding the ways of managing these factors is very important in developing a practice centered on the patient’s needs.

The business strategy must include:

- identifying personal goals and measuring opportunities;
- understanding and applying trends in the industry currently impacting the dental practice;
- identifying methods to reduce costs;
- recognizing the benefits of technology;
- setting fees;
- identifying and evaluating performance indicators;
- assessing costs;
- assessing patient feedback.

Modern dental management is based on the following principles:

- the offered mouth and dental services offered are oriented towards the ‘clients’ (Carausu, 2013);
- the offered health services must be flexible and adaptable to the mouth and dental health needs of the population (Carausu, 2013);
- the development of professional skills and of the management capacities;

- the empowerment of the team members of the dental practice;
- fostering creativity in problem solving (Carasu, 2013);
- reducing bureaucracy;
- implementing new solutions and innovations in order to increase the quality of the provided services.

Because health care costs are rising, medical practices face the challenge of providing a good quality service, but at a low cost (Bai, et al., 2014). From this point of view, dentistry has an outstanding position. It differs from other health specialties because the dental services market is mainly represented by the private sector (González-Robledo, et al., 2012).

Dental care is different in terms of funding and service provision. On the one hand, this is due to the low number of dental diseases, but also to the high frequency with which they occur. On the other hand, patients have usually experienced the same dental procedures several times and, therefore, are able to assess the quality of the service. There is also a greater variety of different treatments available for curing certain diseases than in other conditions, and there also are feasible extensive methods of prevention. Finally, with the exception of dental fractures and toothache, dental care is rarely 'emergency' care, which can give the patient a scheduling of the treatment on a wider timespan (Sintonen and Linnosmaa, 2000). Most dental clinics should think about their own performance in order to remain competitive, efficiency and quality playing essential roles in this respect (Yamalík, 2007).

In an era of responsibility, the profession of dentist must allow for greater accountability with regard to health services of uncertain quality (Yamalík, 2007). The reasons put forward the most in the context of choosing a dental practice are the high quality service, the care for the welfare of the patient and the low cost of the treatment (Mahrous and Hifnawy, 2012). Although, thanks to the Internet, resources have become unlimited, there is controversy on bringing in a significant number of new patients, materialized in the number of new appointments. In this respect, dental practices may use certain marketing strategies, such as special discounts or free examinations. The dentist needs a constant marketing system in order to attract new patients.

Due to the development of social networks, more and more dentists misunderstand the notion of marketing. The number of 'likes' and of visitors to a web page are necessary and useful, but they do not particularly bring profit. The aim of dental marketing is to achieve as many well paid manoeuvres as possible.

Feedback on patient satisfaction following the provision of dental care is essential to the continuous improvement of the provision of specialized services. However, the desires and expectations of patients can be influenced by what the health service provider considers to be suitable for them. Patient satisfaction is influenced by factors related to the communication between the physician and the patient, the interaction between the patient and the team members of the dental practice, the technical competence and the environment offered by dental practice (Mahrous and Hifnawy, 2012).

Efficiency consists in the extent to which the ratio between results and efforts is optimized by creating maximum yields with minimum costs. To gain maximum efficiency in terms of cost, it is necessary to select the combination of factors of production which provide the desired service at the lowest cost (cost effectiveness) (Harris and Sun, 2012). Many researchers have investigated the reasons for inefficiency in the provision of health services. From the study of the scientific literature, it results that aspects of inefficiency come from three main sources: (1) hospitals and other healthcare organizations (Harris and Sun, 2012); (2) clinical procedures; and (3) administration, or from any combination of these three sources.

There are several studies on efficiency in the dental sector (Harris & Sun, 2012), all considering the system as a whole. Previous studies on the topic have an economic approach and focus mainly on the comparability between the effectiveness of different types of dental services (Harris and Sun, 2012). There is great variability in assessing the effectiveness of a clinic, which is measured by the number of individuals treated. Other factors to be taken into account could be differences in the value of human resources; the equipment of the clinic; the number and characteristics of patients seeking treatment; the relative complications of treatment, the duration of treatment; and personnel practices (Cameron, 2002).

The ability to manage failed appointments was recognized as a factor that could compromise the effectiveness of the dental practice. Dental care providers must constantly adapt to the needs and demands of a changing society. To improve efficiency, all available options should be implemented, such as flexible hours, affordable fees, qualified personnel. Barriers in seeking dental health care include cost and fear. Rankin and Harris reported that patients dislike a dentist who starts treatment without any prior description (Rankin and Harris, 1985). Patients are looking for a dentist who listens, who has a friendly attitude and who explain his/her point of view and the treatment procedures. This is consistent with research findings indicating that the most important factor influencing patient satisfaction is the quality of the doctor-patient relationship. Marketing specialists recommend a positive attitude, which is considered to be trusting. Patients trust positive people, and trust is very important in order to both provide the best treatment, and to persuade patients to accept the proposed treatment plan. The physician should not be nervous or agitated and in no case should he/she be focused on other aspects to the detriment of the patient's welfare.

The interior design of the practice should not be ignored in any of its aspects: choice of colours, waiting room design, the functionality of the space or the technology used. In other words, aesthetic demands and expectations relating to the patient's smile re compared to how the design of the working space defines the image and working style of a specific doctor.

The doctor is undoubtedly the key element of the practice, but in the absence of an exceptional team, there is a possibility of failure. Thus, the dentist becomes manager not only in terms of the economic aspects, but also in terms of human relationships. Each team member must be perceived by the manager on the basis of the accumulated knowledge, but also on the basis of the experience gained, so they can be motivated to provide the best quality services to patients (Carausu, 2013).

Management decisions are usually made by the doctor to his/her benefit; decision-making processes based on ethical principles always consider the best interests of the patient, as well as the patient's values and preferences. Management processes and decisions that do not include the patient's point of view may be unethical. However, there are several principles which protect against ethical risks:

- the ethical and professional dentistry aspects shall always take precedence over economic ones;
- the dentist should not unduly influence patients or limit the information necessary for patients to make informed choices;
- the standard of care should be the same for all patients, regardless of the means of payment;
- the patient's needs and interests supersede any business relationship or refund process (American College of Dentists, 2012).

4. Conclusions

The essential activities of organization management represented by the dental office, as far as the leading efficiency is concerned, are represented by the knowledge of the area of activity (diagnosis), the perception of progressive tendencies (prognosis and prospective construction), formulating and adopting the settlement decision of the entire organization, organizing the implementation of the decision through planning and ensuring cooperation within the organization, motivating the personnel in order to obtain maximum efficiency and control, through which the which results will be assessed, compared with costs, according to a new activity planning.

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