

An overview of Dental Practice Management

Pradhan D

Reader, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Sardar Patel Post Graduate Institute of Dental & Medical Sciences, Lucknow

Pruthi N

Professor & Head, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Rama Dental College Hospital & Research Centre, Kanpur

Bansal V

Reader, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Rama Dental College Hospital & Research Centre, Kanpur

Sharma L

Senior Lecturer, Department of Public Health Dentistry, Maharana Pratap Dental College, Kanpur

Corresponding Author

Dr. Devina Pradhan

Reader

Department of Public Health Dentistry
Rama Dental College Hospital & Research Centre

Email Id: drdevinapradhan.rdc@ramauniversity.ac.in

Abstract

Over the ages, oral health care is delivered to the community, in different ways. The horse back dentistry of olden days has evolved into the most modern painless dental procedures, especially after the intervention of the anaesthetic solution. All over the world, different countries have different health care delivery systems. In our country India, different state governments have established the dental offices at different levels from the state capitals to rural areas where salaried dentist give dental treatment.

Till few years back, majority of the dental treatment was rendered by general practitioners. But in the recent years, a trend has been set to render the speciality dental services by the specialists of different branches of dentistry. There is always a scope for the dental professional to start up own private dental clinic to render oral health care for a community residing in a defined area. For a successful dental practice management, proper laws and legislation must be followed and training to the team members is provided at regular intervals. As dentistry is a fast-growing profession, so the latest information and knowledge regarding the equipment's, gadgets, and techniques must be updated. Thus, this review article gives an insight that how an effective and efficient dental practice management is possible.

Keywords

Practice, Management, Dentistry, Skills

An overview of Dental Practice Management

In the early times, dentistry was regarded as 'healing art'. In the dawn of time, dental practice has emerged in the economically

developed nations and achieved a state of a profession.¹ It is the dream of every individual to attain sustenance and shelter from an accepted profession. And if this is achieved, it gives a sense of satisfaction. Therefore, dentistry is one such noble profession, which helps in the provision of delivering high quality dental care to the patients. Dental practice is more of a craft in low-income countries of the world. In moderate-income nation's dentistry has exhibited as a profession to some extent.²

Definition of profession

'A calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation' and 'the whole body of persons engaged in a calling'.

- Webster's Dictionary

Professionalism

'The conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or professional person'.

- Webster's Dictionary

Dental practice

'The practice of dentistry'

- Word web

Dental practice management

'The business principles utilized in the formation, operation or management of a dental facility or office'.

- Free medical dictionary

With the advancements through the 20th century, the profession has changed dramatically with the recent cultural creation of dental care. In today's scenario, dentistry is considered as a high-tech science. Dentists are also required to maintain high ethical standards in order to protect the patients.³ It was seen that many health care professions were providing curative services but dentistry was the first profession, which provided preventive services, education to the patients, creating awareness regarding the utilization of dental services and the causes of various dental problems, enabling the patients to attain behavioural change in order to prevent dental diseases.⁴

One of the essential parts of modern dentistry is 'teamwork', which is very essential and critical in delivering high quality dental care. Building of a good team starts with leadership qualities. So, the leader in the dental practice is the dentist himself. The dentist acts as a role model for the team and sets up a tone for the dental practice.⁵ Efficient leaders enhance the performance of their team by providing them with essential tools and opportunities. Though, one major drawback for the team is that, during the clinic hours, the dentist usually offers very less time on its team management. However, communication and encouragement may lead to build a strong team and to achieve the goals.⁶

In the recent years, the roles of dental care professionals have been re-defined with

essential licensating qualifications in order to maintain professionalism with the whole team.⁷ Young dentist who choose their career in this field have to pass through years of intensive schooling and receive their licenses by passing the university examinations, begin their careers and start up their own dental practice providing quality dental treatments. Whilst pursuing dentistry, the students are professionally trained with proper guidance and appropriate scientific knowledge to provide dental care services in the future but they are not offered classes or courses relating to running a business.⁸ Hence, the key to a successful dental practice is its management in an organized and efficient manner.

Fundamentally, for both the dental graduates and practitioners, hygienists or the budding dentist must have undergone some training regarding the business aspects of the dental practice. Therefore, it means that all the members working together need to have thorough knowledge regarding the working of the dental practice and maintaining professionalism. This will further help in maintaining the efficiency of the practice.⁹

Management skills are also required for a successful practice. The whole team must be well versed with these skills and especially the managers should have an aptitude for achieving them.¹⁰ These scientific management skills include management of the expenditure, income, setting the goals and policies and maintain protocols. In

addition, motivation, loyalty, passion and sense of belonging to the team must be there.^{11, 12} Therefore, in order to practice successful management, the managers need to be informed, comfortable, understanding, relaxed, confident, leaders, in touch, sociable and innovative.¹³

In the ancient times, it was seen that the dentist or the practitioner just managed the procedures for the patient. The business-related aspects of dental practice in today's complex community have been found to be more important for the survival. Therefore, dental practice must be managed efficiently and effectively in order to provide the best dental services to the patients. Also, in the coming times, managing dental practice will be an art that it will evolve continuously like a newer practice.^{14, 15}

There are 2 major goals while practicing dentistry which are:

1. Oral health promotion for the community
2. Preservation of autonomous and economic well-being for the professional.

In the 21st century, dental profession faces change in the population, culturally diverse workforce with patient's clientage, increased laws and legislations by the government at the central and the state level, care management, redefining the duties of a denturist and an assistant in the utilization of achieving a successful dental practice.¹⁶ For

an efficient practice, the practitioner must meet the following goals:

1. Efficient operation
2. Safety and control measures
3. Productivity
4. Utilization of the latest technology
5. Ways to attain profit

A successful dental practice will be led by those dental practitioners who have an overview of all the aspects and opportunities and possess great enthusiasm in meeting new challenges. The business manager seems to be a very important professional for the dental practice as its role include maintenance of records, implementation of the business related operations, maintaining production and profit, quality of systems, checking of the equipments, overdue payments and helping in the maintenance of proper and sound communication between the practitioner (dentist), staff, patient and the community.¹⁷ Because of the business manager, the dentist can provide full range of treatments, education and services to their patients. Therefore, an effective dental practice management requires a proper workforce with proper planning.

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