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Six Sigma in the management of laser-assisted dental practices

Part II: Business restructuring

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Laser-assisted dentistry is an expensive practice not only for the provider but also for the patient. It thus makes sense to take the necessary steps to modify this practice for the mutual benefit of all.

Six Sigma is a quality assurance strategy that helps reconstitute the existing business in a way that the final turnover improves not only in terms of finances but also in terms of the business model. Its main principles were presented in detail in the first part of the article published in *laser 2/18*, where it was discussed that commitment to true process improvement is one of the most important steps for advancing the practice according to Six Sigma.

Reconstituting the business involves several internal changes and works around the existing model and the team. The idea is to reinvent the current performers and their performances.

Six Sigma initiatives

In order to achieve such reinventions, the Six Sigma initiatives detailed in this section can be implemented.

Restructuring the front desk

The front desk is the doorway to the practice; its strength determines the strength and outcomes of the practice to a great extent. Six Sigma greatly acknowl-

edges this fact. It is thus important for the practice to have well-trained front desk staff. Complete information on laser practice should be made available to the front desk team members. They should be able to offer the alternative laser treatment whenever a patient enquires. Staff must use clinical terms in the simplest manner so that the patient will be able to understand. This training is best provided by the laser dentist himself or herself.

The hours when the dentist is not occupied with the patient can be utilised for staff training and shadowing so that the staff can actually see the laser in action and will thus be able to relate this to what they have learnt when speaking with patients on the phone.

Training can include the answers to some of the more common questions that might be posed by clients:
- How are laser fillings done?
- What is a laser?
- How is it better than conventional treatment?
- Is it worth paying the extra cost?
- Will my child be at ease?
- Is there any time difference between a laser and a normal appointment for fillings?
- Will the laser damage any surrounding teeth?
- Is laser treatment safe for young children?
- Will the insurance cover the procedure?
- How can the practice help to get the procedure covered?

If the front desk is able to respond to such questions adequately when proposing the option of laser treatment, this improves the likelihood that the patient will agree to the treatment. In order to add to the patient's further understanding, it is also an option to arrange a free pre-procedural appointment to discuss the queries at length. Especially in the case of paediatric patients such informative appointments with only the parents are recommended.

Utilising auxiliary staff during free hours

In order to use the existing assets of the practice more effectively, the assistant and sterilisation staff can be assigned duties apart from their routine tasks. These duties could include the following:

1. Checking missed appointments, listing them, informing the front desk, who can then make routine timely calls to these patients and try to rebook them, and making sure that these patients are called at least three times before sending the final SMS reminder;

2. recalls or periodic check-up appointment reminders can be automatically generated or given through manually via phone calls or by SMS;

3. updating the practice in terms of improving the information that is given to the patient, preparing the literature to be given out, and preparing optimal standard of teaching models and videos for patients.

Continuing education for the dentist and the auxiliary staff

Train the trainer programmes are the idea of the moment. Further the laser dentist should conduct occasional training for other dental professionals and for the assisting staff.

Training the assisting staff regarding the machine, its functioning and its maintenance can spare the practice long-term expenses that may otherwise be incurred if problems were not diagnosed in time. These courses are generally offered by the laser companies periodically and can be pre-checked and registered for.

Utilising technical assistance in the practice

The information technology department can be utilised along with the media department to create videos of lasers during treatment and these can then be used for social media promotion. People's understanding of lasers is better when they have seen them in action.

Involving the financial department

Whatever is monitored or measured is what is improved. Feedback from the financial department on the cost of the investment in laser and the return on the same allows the practice to better plan for the future. It is important to establish on a regular basis



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the cost of the upkeep of the laser, the actual cost of investment, the break-even period and/or the percentage of profits expected.

Feedback from the financial department can be the underlying foundation that helps the practice foresee the possible returns on the laser investment.

Conclusion

In precise terms, reinventing/restructuring the existing assets in the practice can itself produce a manifold outcome. The target of successful practice management is to see the maximum outcomes, but this does not always have to be based on more input.

The Six Sigma implementation steps follow the DMAIC model: define, measure, analyse, improve and control (as described in *laser 2/18*). Restructuring the existing system by giving standardised protocols of functioning to each level is the core structure build-up of Six Sigma-based dental practice. Once the systems have been established in relation to performance, there needs to be continual monitoring; otherwise, the whole system can crash and revert to the beginning.

These relapses can be avoided if there is an assigned member of the team at each level to monitor and report to the person concerned. Creating hierarchy was once obsolete, but according to Six Sigma, the flow of activities can best be monitored when there are checks by the right people at all levels.

The final step towards optimised practice management is maintaining the established model of performance at all levels, documenting the success achieved and striving for further progress during the next control stage.

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Kurz & bündig

Im ersten Teil des Artikels erläuterte die Autorin bereits detailliert, die Bedeutung des Six Sigma als Managementsystem zur kontinuierlichen Prozessverbesserung und Qualitätssteigerung. Die wichtigsten Prinzipien zur Implementierung in der zahnärztlichen Praxis, insbesondere mit Fokus auf Laserbehandlungen wurden bereits in der *laser 2/18* vorgestellt. Im zweiten Teil präsentiert Dr. Imneet Madan die fünf wichtigsten Schritte, um die angestrebte Prozessverbesserung bestmöglich umzusetzen und unterstreicht welche Teamkomponenten dabei von besonderer Bedeutung sind. Aufgrund der relativ hohen Kosten, welche mit Laserbehandlungen sowohl für den Zahnarzt als auch für den Patienten verbunden sind, sollte eine Prozessoptimierung auf allen Ebenen angestrebt werden.

Beim Six Sigma steht das Team stets im Vordergrund. Die Idee ist es, die vorhandenen Bedingungen zu optimieren, d. h. die gegenwärtigen Mitarbeiter und deren Leistungen effektiver zu nutzen und Potenziale gezielter auszuschöpfen. Bedeutend ist es zudem, eine Six Sigma-Hierarchie zu implementieren, um eine regelmäßige Prüfung, Dokumentierung der erzielten Erfolge und eine beständige Optimierung aller Prozesse auf allen Ebenen zu garantieren.

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