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Successful communication in your daily practice

Part X: How to improve your own punctuality

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This series covers the most common and challenging scenarios that might arise in your dental practice and presents successful ways to deal with them in order for you to enjoy greater peace of mind. Each article of this series teaches you a new, easy-to-use specialised protocol which can easily be adapted to your own dental clinic's requirements and needs right from the start. Today's challenging topic: how to improve on delays that might occur in your dental practice owing to poor time management and find ways to be more punctual instead.

In the following, I will provide five essential steps to manage it. Being on time is significant—not only for you as a dentist, but for your practice staff and patients as well. They only feel respected if you are on time and don't keep them waiting. Always keep in mind that they have more important things to do than being kept waiting in the reception area of your dental practice. Your schedule might easily go off the rails if a patient still needs to be taken care of, but the next one is already waiting.

Consider the following scenario: you are preparing for a normal and—usually—easy tooth extraction. However, the procedure turns out to be more complicated than you thought and now you have to perform a complicated and time-consuming surgery instead. This situation becomes even worse when the next patient arrives on time for his or her scheduled appointment and you still have to treat the patient sitting in front of you. The patient left waiting will probably be angry and frustrated and you might lose him or her as a loyal patient.

5 essential steps

In order to cope with situations like the one that I have just described more effortlessly and effectively, follow these five steps:

1. Say that you're sorry
Immediately express your apologies to the patient who has been kept waiting and state how deeply sorry you are. If necessary and possible, interrupt the still ongoing previous appointment in order to do that. Here's what you can say: "I promise that, next time, you will get the first appointment of the day, so that there cannot be any delays whatsoever."

> The best dentist is the one that respects his or her patients by being punctual.

2. Avoid excuses
Don't try to wriggle out of the situation by giving drawn-out explanations for why there are delays. It's unprofessional and the patient probably won't care anyway; he or she just wants to be treated. Patients come to you to have their problems fixed and not the other way around.

3. Give in order to receive
Replace bad news with good news. For instance, tell the patient who has been kept waiting that he or she will receive a free laser-assisted treatment session to make up for the inconvenience caused. However, be prepared for possible negative reactions towards your offer. If that happens, show understanding and compassion.

4. Make use of your assistant
Instruct your assistant to always remind you of an upcoming appointment five minutes ahead. Your assistant can become your personal alarm. If there are any delays, also instruct him or her to let your next patient know for how long he or she will probably have to wait. By doing so, possible annoyance and irritation from the patient's side can be avoided.

5. Make a change
Start your daily programme earlier than usual each day. In addition, schedule some extra time for every appointment, even if you don't end up needing it. For instance, if you schedule 20 minutes per appointment, now plan for 30 minutes instead. I'm aware that, in the beginning, you probably won't like it, but by doing so, you are already allowing for possible delays.

Isn't that easy?

Implement the above-mentioned steps as a protocol in your daily practice and you will soon notice that you are in control again of time-related issues in the day-to-day work of your practice. Now knowing the exact steps to avoid and resolve unwanted situations created by poor time management, you will gain greater peace of mind in the long run. Moreover, I'm certain that you won't end up losing patients (and possibly their families too) when following these steps. Just try them out and let me know what you think!

I am sure that you are already looking forward to the next issue of the laser magazine, in which I will present the 11th part of this unique series of communication concepts and touch on further useful and interesting topics. Are you curious about what's next? We will discuss how to attract patients from abroad and extend your patient base on an international scale. Wouldn't you agree that the topic of medical tourism is extremely interesting? In addition to discussing the subject, I will provide seven crucial methods to achieve your goals.

Until then, remember that you are not only the dentist at your clinic, but also its manager and leader. For questions and further information and guidance, don't hesitate to reach out by sending me an e-mail at dba@yiannikosdental.com or via our website, www.dbamastership.com. I am looking forward to our next step towards business growth and educational development!

about the author



Dr Anna Maria Yiannikos (DDS, LSO, MSc, MBA) is one of the first two women worldwide to have obtained a master's degree in laser dentistry. She has owned a dental clinic for 23 years now and is the leader of the innovative Dental Business Administration Mastership Course at RWTH Aachen University in Germany.

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