



Scheduling, Are You Serving It or Is It Serving You?

Setting up a consistently repeatable and effective schedule is one of the greatest challenges that face a dental practice. Coordinating staff and patients in an efficient low stress manner is a difficult if not elusive objective. If you do not have a clear scheduling format for your practice, your appointment book will control your office instead of your business assistant.

To accomplish a low stress and productive schedule we must look at what we are attempting to accomplish and then starting with the result we want, work back to see how that could be accomplished.

1. Give the patient our best

A well-designed schedule should allow us to be able to sit down with our patient in as few visits as possible to accomplish optimum treatment. We should allow enough time to complete the treatment scheduled with minimal interruption.

2. Enjoy a low stress practice

Many Doctors and Staff have observed that the most hectic days tend to result in lower production and higher stress. On the other hand, all of us have experienced the efficiently smooth day, which coincided with a high production. These days tend to have longer, well-planned appointments with few unwelcome surprises.

3. Have enough time to provide optimal care

One of the major stress producing issues in a practice is running late. This is simple enough to correct. However, my observation is that we seem too busy and stressed to correct it. Buy a simple digital timer. This allows you to accurately record how long each procedure will take. Get one in each room, including hygiene. Schedule for the real amount of time it takes for each procedure.

4. Start on time and finish the day on time

By having a consistent schedule format you will have fewer surprises and be able to put the most predictable treatment toward the end of the day when everyone, including the patient, is ready to go home. By starting on time we eliminate running behind from the beginning.

5. Reach daily production goal

In order to be financially able to provide optimal care for our patients and to compensate Staff and Doctor certain production goals must be met. I often find chaos, low Doctor and Staff moral, and high staff turnover (the Doctor has to stay, or they might have left too!) in practices who regularly do not meet their production goals. Assume for now that we collect what we produce. I'll cover collections in another issue.

To achieve the optimum schedule we start with the most demanding procedures first (when we are the freshest) and end our day with the most predictable.



For the General Dentist, the most demanding technical procedures are Crown and Bridge and Cosmetics. Ideally you will have 1 to 3 patients in the morning for this type of treatment. The key to reaching your production goal is to schedule the first 2 hours or more of your day with multiple units on one patient.

For the hygienist, again start with their most demanding procedure, a scale and root plane patient. This way the Doctor can anesthetize and then both can work uninterrupted to completion on their patients. So, at 8:00 am, for example, Doctor gives anesthesia to two patients and has 2 hours uninterrupted to work on the primary patient of the day.

For the business assistant, the first 2 hours of every day are predictable and you have time to make confirmation calls, as well as taking care of the office business.

For the second 2-hour morning block, we will strive to put in a second patient for optimum multiple units or we may see 2 patients, one each hour for single units of Crown and Bridge, Endodontics, Quadrant Restorations, etc.

After lunch the Doctor sees consultation patients for case acceptance. This allows you to always be on time for these patients who are the cornerstones of your practice. The office is quiet and you aren't running from room to room.

From about 1:30 to 3:30 is aerobic time. This is time reserved for fillings, adjustments, look-sees, broken teeth and toothaches. A key to this is to go in with the patient do the scheduled treatment and move on to the next patient. With broken teeth and toothaches fix the problem (get them out of the discomfort in the simplest manner possible) then schedule the appropriate amount of time to properly restore the area. Always look at the adjacent teeth. Many times there are 3 or 4 teeth in the quadrant to fix, not just the one tooth that is the problem today. This will assist you in scheduling your 2-hour morning blocks.

From 3:30 to close is time to seat Crown and Bridge or cosmetics. These are the most predictable procedures. If they are not, find out why, then correct it and enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Hygienist should have an easy, predictable, healthy patient at day's end. These last hygiene appointments are for patients who are responsible. They take care of themselves dentally, they show up on time and they gladly pay for your treatment.

How to start:

1. Pick a day in the future, when the doctors book is clear, and set up an ideal schedule
2. Hold the morning 2-hour block open until the afternoon before the block
3. Put only multiple units of Crown and Bridge or Cosmetics in the AM 2 hour block
4. Put seats at the end of the day and consultations right after lunch
5. Keep adding ideal days until that is all you have

It requires discipline by the Doctor and Staff to stay on schedule and to attain their daily goal. This scheduling template will help your office enjoy the benefits of enjoyable days, day after day.