

Dental Practice Framework: A Review

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Abstract

The essence of modern-day 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 itself. Efficient leaders enhance the performance of their team by providing them with essential tools and opportunities. The team generally comprises of dental professionals according to the specific skills and knowledge, dental nurses, hygienists, dental therapist, practice managers, receptionists, care co- coordinators and dental technicians. 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. This review therefore focuses on in-depth dental practice framework.

Keywords: Dental, Practice, Managers, Framework

Introduction

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.

"Managing a practice is an art in itself which everybody has to master it so as to lead a comfortable, satisfied life." In the modern years, there are some extensive changes in the roles of the dental professionals. The career in the field of dentistry is more structured and organized not only for the dentist but also for the complete dental team.[2]

The essence of modern-day 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 itself. The dentist acts as a role model for the team and sets up a tone for the dental practice.[3] Efficient leaders enhance the performance of their team by providing them with essential tools and opportunities. The team generally comprises of dental professionals according to the specific skills and knowledge, dental nurses, hygienists, dental therapist, practice managers, receptionists, care co- coordinators and dental

technicians.[4] All across the globe, various countries have various kinds of health care delivery systems. In India, state governments of various states have allowed for the establishment of dental practices at different levels from the capital states to the rural areas where a dentist can provide dental care services.2 Dental care can be delivered on the basis of: private dental practice, dental hospitals, departmental store clinics, franchise clinics and public programs.

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 equipment's, overdue payments and helping in the maintenance of proper and sound communication between the practitioner (dentist), staff, patient and the community.[5] 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.

Roles of the dental team

- A. Dentist:** The core individuals of a successful dental practice are the dentist.[2] Their roles and responsibilities include: providing oral health education to the patients, clinical examination and diagnosis of the dental conditions of the patients including radiographic examination etc, assessment of the available treatment options and treatment planning for the patients, carrying out dental treatments like composite and amalgam restorations, root canal treatment, oral prophylaxis, root planning and curettage, extractions, alveoloplasties, suturing, minor surgeries and detection of oral mucosal lesions, maintenance of records of patients attending the clinics/hospitals, training, management and recruitment of the staff, maintenance of stocks and marketing services to the potential clients
- B. Dental nurses:** The nurses play a vital role in the dental practice by assisting the dentists, hygienists and therapist while providing dental services to the patients. With extensive knowledge regarding the dental procedures, nurses help in making the instruments and materials ready for the clinicians as and when required. They also help in providing suction to the clinician to work in for the comfort of the patient and their safety in the premises. They are also engaged in the maintenance of infection control measures, which includes sterilization of the instruments and area near the dental chair.[4]
- C. Hygienists:** Their role includes: patient education and motivation, oral prophylaxis and polishing, demonstration of flossing and brushing techniques and preventive procedures like application of topical fluoride and pit and fissure sealants.
- D. Dental therapist:** Their role included: carrying out some less complex clinical procedures like fillings, mobile teeth extractions and cementation of the crown, impression taking and dental X-rays.
- E. Practice managers:** They are involved in legal, personnel and business issues and hence enable a dentist to focus on clinical aspects.[5] The role and responsibilities of practice manager include: book keeping, preparation of pay rolls, human resource management, financial management and strategic management.
- F. Receptionist:** Receptionists are also key people in an effective dental practice management. They require expertise skills drawn from the service and healthcare divisions, which included hands on training and some experience to meet the required needs of the patients at the dental clinic/

hospital. Dental receptionists are the major links between the practice team workforce and the public. Also, they have major role in marketing of the dental practice which includes greeting of patients, making appointments, payments, organization of the records of the patients and relevant paperwork required at the practice.[6]

- G. Care coordinators:** The role of the care coordinators include: discussion of the various treatment options available with their involved costs, empowering patients and meeting the dental care needs of the patients
- H. Dental technicians:** The role of the dental technicians include: involved in fabrication of crowns, bridges, orthodontic appliances, removable partial dentures and complete dentures and assisting the dentist.

Dental care delivery

A. Private dental practice

In the ancient times, dental care in the private setting was rendered by the dental practitioners; the only place where a clinician provided as many numbers of hours or days to work as he/ she chooses to. One of the advantages of a private practice was flexibility between the patient and the dentist. There are 2 types of private practice:

- I. **Solo practice:** In this type, the practitioner renders dental care services whole solely.
- II. **Group practice:** In this type, a team of people works with dentist in order to provide dental treatments to the patient. Sometimes, in such a setting other dentists might also be employed by the dentist itself for the practice.[7,8]

B. Dental hospitals

Due to some complex dental procedures that can be rendered in the hospitals, dentists play a very substantial role. Dentists who are employed in railways, military services and the veterans department are actually involved in providing hospital-based practices. Some treatment which are required to be performed in the hospitals are surgeries for removal of carcinomas, cleft lip and cleft palate repairs, maxillofacial prosthetic treatment for the victims of accidents and burns etc. In addition, patients suffering from any serious systemic diseases for which there is a risk of being treated at the clinic and hence such patients are treated at the hospitals. [1]

C. Departmental store clinics

In the ancient times, around the late 1970's the United States had some clinics opened under the departmental store chain of Sears and Montgomery

ward. Such clinics had their working hours as of the store hours. However, the concept of dental clinics in departmental stores was not at all successful.

D. Franchise clinics

Around the early 1980's, there had been a need regarding franchise dental clinics. The basic concept of this was that franchise was intended to use the name, its management and marketing services, bulk purchasing of the stock and its construction. [1]

But this concept declined by the year 1988 because of poor management skills, undercapitalization, unprofessionalism and higher costs involved. Again in 1990, this concept came into existence where whole of the dental practices were purchased who had complete setups. Still, some more years will be required for this concept to be properly evaluated. [9, 10]

Conclusion

The dental practice framework includes most importantly the managerial skills and roles 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] The team must be motivated, loyal, passionate and have a sense of belonging for achieving success.[11, 12] Therefore, in order to practice successful management, the complete team needs to be informed, comfortable, understanding, relaxed, confident, leaders, in touch, sociable and innovative.[13] 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 and it will evolve continuously like a newer practice. [14]

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