

Improving the Scheduling System with Procedural Time Studies

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An efficient scheduling system keeps everyone in the practice—doctor, staff and patients—moving at a steady pace and showing up in the right place at the right time. However, if your scheduling coordinator allocates the wrong amount of time for various procedures, the entire system will break down.

Given too little time, you'll begin falling behind and may find yourself rushing as patients back up in the reception area. If too *much* time has been scheduled, you'll experience another kind of stress, unsettled by the knowledge that you could have easily fit more production into the day were it not for inaccurate appointment times.

Fortunately, there's an easy way to solve this problem: conduct procedural time studies.

Taking the Guesswork Out of Scheduling

Do you take the same amount of time today to perform a procedure as you did 10 years ago? How much time does that new imaging technology *really* save your hygienist? Has training enabled your assistants to do their jobs faster?

The point is, everything changes... the skills of you and your staff, the clinical procedures, the technologies and materials your practice uses, etc. If you (or your scheduling coordinator) try to guess how much time to allow for each appointment, there's a high probability that a number of those guesses will be off target.

The only way to remedy this problem is to conduct procedural time studies whenever your practice has experienced changes likely to alter the time you spend on various tasks. Follow these steps:

1. List all commonly recurring procedures, not only for yourself but also for the hygienist, assistants and other team members.
2. Document how much time it takes to provide these services. Results will vary, of course, so you should time at least 10 instances of each and then average them.
3. Give the list of treatment times to the scheduling coordinator, who will then be able to set up appointments based on current, documented facts rather than outdated ideas or guesswork.

Many dentists who conduct these simple time studies are surprised at the results... which proves how valuable they are... and gratified when their daily schedules are no longer punctuated by rushing or downtime.

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