

# Optimizing Practice Productivity

Andrea Dickhaut, RDH, BSDH, MHA

We all know that the key to the financial success of a dental practice is generating more revenue from patient care than we need to cover operating costs. While industry benchmarks are nice to have, the tremendous variability among dental practices can make productivity benchmarks irrelevant in a practical sense.

In optimizing productivity, we should first determine what goals we need to achieve. If your goal as practice owner is to generate \$1 million in net patient revenue to have a nice surplus after covering operating costs, divide that \$1 million by the number of days the practice is open in the year to determine your net patient revenue goal per day. For example, the practice is open 184 days per year (on average).  $\$1,000,000 \div 184 \text{ days} = \$5,435$  per day. This means that the practice as a whole needs to generate at least this much per day on average to meet its financial goals. This goal is spread across all providers each day (dentists and hygienists).

Once you know the daily net revenue goal you need to achieve, you can start monitoring whether the practice is meeting that goal. The two primary ways to reach the goal are to maximize patient access to care and focus on completion of patients' treatment plans. A practice's focus should not be on convincing patients to accept expensive treatment plans. Rather, the focus should be on

engaging patients as key members of the care team, explaining all potential treatment options clearly and honestly, letting patients decide their course of treatment without undue pressure and then completing the planned treatment in a timely manner.

Providers (and support staff) should not be pushed (or motivated) to work beyond their capacity. Nothing burns out staff (and patients) faster than being part of a practice that is overscheduled.

A practice that focuses on being efficient can maximize visits and complete treatments without anyone feeling rushed. The pace may be brisk, but the mood of the practice is calm, cool and collected. The following is a list of the top five key attributes of efficient practices.

## 1. Teamwork

Everyone in the practice pitches in to help where needed, including the practice owner. Staff are alert for opportunities to step in and do something without having to wait to be asked. Each staff member understands that they are critical to practice success and feels appreciated for the work they do.

## 2. Automation

The practice takes advantage of opportunities to digitize key operations wherever practical. This makes life easier for staff and patients and can reduce the amount of time required to complete important tasks.

## 3. Scheduling

The practice schedules patients for the exact amount of time needed to complete the work to be done in the visit. Ideally, each general dentist should have at least two operatories with staggered appointments. The template should reflect when in each

appointment the dentist is needed vs. not needed.

## 4. Optimum Staffing

The gold standard for dental assistants is one per operator (which ensures that your hygienists also have dedicated assistants). When assistants are not needed in their operator, they are floating throughout the practice, helping out wherever needed. There should be enough staff at the front desk to ensure that they are able to perform their work, which is critical to practice success, with ease and excellence.

## 5. Communication

Communication is prioritized within the practice, with morning huddles and regular staff meetings. Throughout the day, staff are talking to each other about what is going on in the practice and what might be needed in the moment to keep things running smoothly.



**Andrea Dickhaut**  
RDH, BSDH, MHA  
Program Manager/Senior Consultant  
978-870-9024  
[andreadickhaut@d4dimension.com](mailto:andreadickhaut@d4dimension.com)  
[www.D4practicesolutions.com](http://www.D4practicesolutions.com)  
[linkedin.com/company/d4practicesolutions](https://linkedin.com/company/d4practicesolutions)

